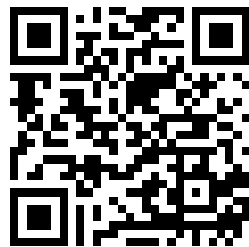

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THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918.

6th SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS

CAMPAIGN REMINISCENCES

by

Capt. R. T. Peel, M.C.

and

Capt. A. H. Macdonald, M.C.

W. S. Morkay.

6th Seafth Mrs (T.F.)

Revised for 1923

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Contents

PART I.

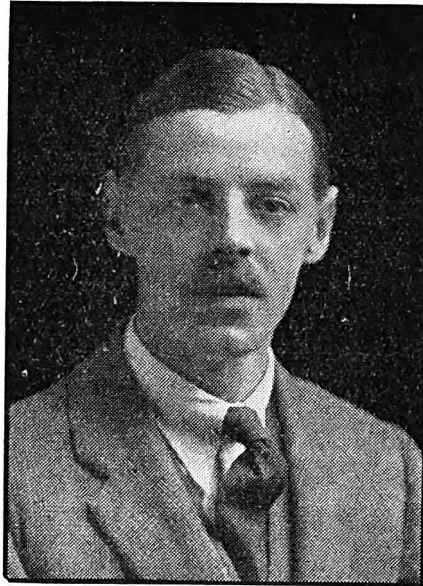
(By Capt. R. T. Peel, M.C.)

First Experiences—Richebourg	-	-	-	-	-	5-8
Festubert	-	-	-	-	-	8-11
Laventie and the Move to the Somme	-	-	-	-	-	11-13
The Somme Country in 1915	-	-	-	-	-	13-17
A Welcome Rest—The Labyrinth	-	-	-	-	-	17-20
The Labyrinth and Vimy Ridge	-	-	-	-	-	21-23
The Battle of the Somme	-	-	-	-	-	23-26
Armentieres	-	-	-	-	-	26-30
The Battle of Beaumont Hamel	-	-	-	-	-	30-36

PART II.

(By Capt. A. H. Macdonald, M.C.)

The Third Battle of Ypres	-	-	-	-	-	37-49
Cambrai, 1917—First Phase	-	-	-	-	-	50-56
Cambrai—Second Phase and Later	-	-	-	-	-	56-61



CAPT. R. T. PEEL, M.C.

PART I.

First Experiences—Richebourg.

After many false starts, on May 1st, 1915, the Battalion really did start on its journey to France. After marching through the town, where the people of Bedford gave us a final send-off, we entrained at the sidings and were taken straight to Folkestone. Here we embarked on board ship, and crossed the Channel about midnight. On arrival at Boulogne, we had a march of about two miles, with a very steep hill to ascend at the finish, before we reached the camp, which was our lodging-house for the night. Here we straightway had a taste of the discomforts of active service, for 16 men had to be crowded into each tiny little bivouac tent which should really have only held four, and, to make matters worse, it came on to pour with rain. However, such minor discomforts were easily borne, when we had the thought that at last we were in France, ready to do our bit, to console us.

Next afternoon the Battalion again paraded and marched to Pont de Briques station, where we entrained for our first ride in a French train. This, however, we found nothing to boast about, particularly the cattle trucks for the accommodation of the "other ranks" with their little placards—

CHEVAUX EN LONG 8
HOMMES 40

The journey in these conditions seemed interminable, and we appeared to go on and on through the night, till we almost expected to find ourselves inside the German lines. Actually it was only about 40 miles, and we eventually detrained at Merville about three o'clock in the morning. Thence we had a march of about six miles to our billeting area. As we went, the sun shone and the signs of spring were everywhere, but in the distance we heard the first dull booming of the guns.

French Middens.

Our destination was the nice little village of Robecq, and it did not take long before every one was comfortably settled down in roomy barns with beds of straw. Here we spent a very pleasant ten days, incidentally learning much of the ways of our gallant allies the French. We soon learnt that the middens in the farmyards were the household gods of the families, and great was their wrath when we attempted to stifle their malodorousness with cart-loads of earth: we learnt that, if you wanted to kill a pig in a French village, all you had to do was to take it into the middle of the street and perform the operation, then and there: we learnt that when we heard the mystic word "Napoo" it was no use trying to

obtain supplies of coffee or eggs: we learnt to execrate the "pavé" roads which were so trying to our feet, when we were trudging along in route marches. The weather was ideal and wonderfully hot for May, and every one was in the best of health and spirits. On Sunday we had open-air services.

Needless to say, our thoughts turned ever upon what was to come. Day after day we heard the guns thundering away to the east of us, and knew that heavy fighting was taking place over there. It was indeed the bombardment for the attack of May 9th that we heard, round Festubert and Richebourg.

Early on May 14th we had the expected orders for an immediate move. The whole Brigade made a long march northwards, and in the evening we found ourselves billeted in the village of Strazele on the Belgian border. Before their retreat, the Germans had been in Strazele, and many were the stories the inhabitants told us. In the billet where A Company was quartered, you could even see the bullet-holes that had been made when the Germans were driven out again.

We were now so far north that it looked as if Ypres would be our final destination, and, indeed, it probably nearly was, for critical fighting at Ypres was now going on. However, fate ruled otherwise. After a stay of a few days in Strazele, the Brigade once more took the road on the evening of May 18th. After a very trying march, we halted outside the town of Estaires. Here we waited for an hour or so, when we started off again, eventually arriving at our billets in Vieille Chapelle early in the morning. These billets were in no way so commodious as those we had occupied hitherto, for we were now only about four miles from the trenches. Most of the farms, besides being overcrowded, showed evidences of the attentions of shells. Moreover, there was a battery of our own guns in the village, which somewhat disturbed our slumbers when they fired, but which we shortly inspected with a good deal of interest.

In the forenoon the Colonel, the Company Commanders, and some N.C.O.'s went up to see over the trenches the Battalion was to occupy, and they found them quite exciting enough.

In the Line.

In the evening the Battalion paraded for its first spell of duty in the line. During the march up, we soon came under long-range artillery fire, but none of the shells dropped close enough to be unpleasant. After marching for about an hour, we halted at a school-house on the outskirts of the ruined village of Richebourg, until it should be dark enough for us to proceed farther towards the trenches. Here the Brigadier joined the Colonel and gave him further instructions as to the holding of our sector of the trenches, his remarks being punctuated by the explosions of a

battery of 6-inch guns, which were firing just outside the school. When darkness came, we moved on again, and, passing through Richebourg, soon found ourselves at the reserve trenches, where Battalion Headquarters was situated. We were much interested in the pyrotechnic display of flares, which were being fired incessantly, chiefly by the Germans, and lit up the whole sky. Guides were provided for each company at this point to take us up to the front line. The route was chiefly over the open, for communication trenches hardly existed here. There had, indeed, been no time during the heavy fighting of the last week to dig them. A Company, at the head of whom went the Colonel, were unlucky enough to have their guide wounded after crossing the support trench, and had to find the rest of their way as best they might. However, by about 3 a.m. every one was settled in, and the relief completed without accidents. A Company (i.e. one platoon), C Company, and D Company held the front line, while B Company were in support. The trenches were all breastworks, it being impossible to dig down in that soil without coming to water, and they had only recently been vacated by the Germans, who had been forced to retire to a distance of about 600 yards and start consolidating a new trench. When dawn broke, we were able to take stock of our surroundings, and a terrible litter they appeared to be in. All round our trenches were great shell-holes, half full of water, and in all directions lay the yet unburied corpses of both British and German soldiers, while everywhere arms and accoutrements of all sorts were scattered broadcast.

The Baptism of Fire.

The Germans soon showed their displeasure at having been forced from their comfortable home, and all day continued to shell our trenches with considerable accuracy. Our baptism of fire was no light one. During the daytime little work could be done, except to improve the existing trenches and to repair the breaches made by the shells, but at night every one was kept busy. It was desirable to get to closer grips with the enemy than a distance of 600 yards: so we had to dig a new trench, about 200 yards in advance of the old one, working, of course, right out in the open. Then there were the rations and water and the letters to be carried up to the men in the front. The signallers, too, under Sergeant Stronach, had no light task. All their wires were constantly being cut by shell-fire, and had continually to be repaired. Many messages consequently had to be carried by hand, and the journeys from Battalion Headquarters to the front line were rendered hard work by the mud and exciting enough by the shell and rifle fire.

During the second night of our stay, the Gurkhas, who were on our left, made a local

attack on the German trench in front of them, but they were received with a terrific volume of rifle and machine-gun fire, and lost very heavily. What the Gurkhas really enjoyed most was to spot a German sniper out in No Man's Land, and then at night to stalk him and bring him in.

After three days in the line, on the night of May 22nd, we were relieved by another battalion of the Brigade. Considering the amount of shell-fire there had been, we were very lucky in the matter of casualties, only losing two men killed and seven wounded. During our march back to the village of Lacouture, we came in for a violent thunderstorm and torrents of rain, and on arrival found that the billeting accommodation consisted of open fields in which to bivouac. However, every one was too tired to worry over a trifle of this sort and soon slept soundly under his waterproof sheet.

A Typical French Village.

The little village of Lacouture, where we now rested for five days, was typical of the North of France. It consisted of one small main street dotted with farmhouses owning large outbuildings of wood and plaster, mostly in a wretched state of repair. Situated, as it was, about five miles in rear of the firing line, it still retained most of its inhabitants, a great proportion of whom were suspected, probably wrongly, of being spies. Their chief method of transmitting information was supposed to be by carrier pigeon, so, acting upon orders from the Brigade, Lieut. Petrie amused himself by picking off any unfortunate pigeons which showed themselves on the farm roofs, much to the not unnatural indignation of the inhabitants. The country round was all flat cultivated land, with no hedges, but intersected by numerous ditches, in which the frogs croaked lustily in the twilight. A few grass fields existed near the farms, and in these the men for the most part had their bivouacs. The officers were in the farms, but space was very limited and the odours arising from the middens a great deal too powerful.

Working Parties.

Here we made our acquaintance with working parties, which we soon found to be almost more trying than actually being in the trenches. About half of the Battalion was employed on work of various kinds every night. The first party was sent up on Whit Sunday under Major Gair, and consisted of A and C Companies. The party paraded about 7 p.m., duly equipped with the small black pads to cover the mouth, which were the first attempt to give protection against the poison gas that the Germans had recently used at Ypres.

After marching up to the trenches, we started our unpleasant task, which consisted of collecting and burying the dead, which lay behind

the front line. The corpses had been lying out in the hot sun for the last week or more, and the horrible charnel-house reek which pervaded everything was a sore trial to the squeamish. However, the task was a necessary one and had to be done.

For a while the Germans were very kind to us, and only sent over a few shells, which did no harm. About 1 a.m., however, he must have spotted us, as he fired up about a dozen flares simultaneously and then swept the ground we were on with rifle fire. We all had to lie flat with considerable alacrity, with the bullets "phutting" into the ground all round. However, we were lucky and there were practically no casualties, and the firing ceased after about a quarter of an hour, when the party was safely withdrawn, arriving back in billets about 4 a.m. One unfortunate incident, however, occurred. Captain A. D. Macdonald sprained his ankle during the evening and had to be taken off to hospital. This now left A Company two officers short, as Lieut. Hudson had gone sick to hospital before the first tour in the trenches. On another night the work to be done was the digging of a communication-trench from the support line to the firing line. This was successfully accomplished without any special incidents. As may be understood, these fatigues were hard work, lasting as they did for about ten hours in all.

Lieut.-Col. Grant Smith.

It was at this time that the Battalion was unfortunate enough to have to say good-bye to its Commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel Maclaren, who returned to England. Major Grant Smith took his place, being shortly afterwards confirmed in his appointment and promoted Lieut.-Colonel, and he successfully commanded the Battalion for many months to come. Another departure was that of our first interpreter, a learned Professor with a black beard, who had caused considerable amusement during our stay in the trenches, whither he had insisted on accompanying the Colonel, though it was no part of his duty. He was taken sick with gastric trouble and had to leave us.

Even so far back as this from the line the enemy would not let us alone, and on more than one occasion amused themselves by dropping a few shells into the village. C Company, finding things a little too warm to be pleasant, had to make a hurried departure to a fresh field in which to bivouac. The casualties, luckily, were few and slight, but it was a little upsetting to the nerves. Work was quickly started on the construction of dug-outs in the fields, but this caused instant friction with the inhabitants owing to the disappearance of their trees, wood, etc. Consequently the material for the proposed dug-outs was very scanty.

On Friday, May 28th, the Battalion moved up about two miles closer to the trenches, and was quartered afresh in dug-outs and farms round about the village of Le Touret. Here we remained for three days without incident. The Brigadier held a meeting of the officers on Sunday, and after expressing himself as pleased with the behaviour of the Battalion during its first experience of the line, cheered us all up by stating that he thought we had so far only bitten off the edge of the crust of the pie, and had yet to get to the middle of it! That same evening we received orders that we were to move back to the village of Pacaut, about six miles farther from the line, and rest there for a week. The march was heavy going, but we were all pleased to find our-

selves once more in respectable billets and freed from the prospect of being shelled. Our stay here was very pleasant, and we spent the time in smartening ourselves up and practising bayonet fighting. On June 1st we lined the road into Locon as a guard of honour to the Prime Minister, who was making a tour of the back areas.

On the last day at Pacaut, Major Gair was definitely appointed second-in-command of the Battalion, and Captain Legge came to succeed him in command of A Company. Here also the blue Balmoral, covered with a khaki cover, was issued to us, instead of the unsightly and inconvenient kind of postman's cap to go over the Glengarry, with which we left England.

Festubert.

On Friday, June 4th, the Battalion again started up to the trenches, after previous reconnaissance of the new sector by the Company Commanders. The march was broken for a halt half-way on the banks of a canal, where tea was consumed, after which, when it became dark enough, we proceeded on our way along the well-known Rue du Bois to the sector of trenches a little way north of the village of Festubert, passing through the Indian village shortly before entering the trenches. B, C, and D Companies relieved the Canadians in the front line, D Company having the 1st Black Watch on their left. A Company held the support trench about 150 yards in rear of the front line. Battalion Headquarters was situated in reserve dug-outs in the rear. We found our new sector little, if any, better than the previous one at Richebourg. Here also the Germans had been forced to retire during the recent fighting, and the litter of battle had not yet been cleared away. All the way up to the trenches our nostrils had been assailed with the inevitable smells, and in the trenches things were just the same. I remember that just opposite my little shelter in the support trench the corpse of a German lay half-exposed in the side of the parapets of the trench. I very soon found him insupportable and had him removed and decently interred.

The front line was a sorry apology for a trench, consisting as it did of a high mound, into the top of which sandbags had been built to make fire positions. Great gaps appeared in the top of it at intervals of every ten yards or so, where the enemies' crumps had blown it in, and their snipers watched these gaps with eager eyes for the chance of a shot. Behind the mound there was no regular parapet—nothing but a path to move along and

a few hastily constructed and entirely insecure shelters—mere log huts with one or two layers of sandbags on the top of them. If a whizz-bang hit them, they were doomed. D Company, on the left, perhaps had the nastiest place of all, being situated in the famous orchard which the Canadians had taken with great gallantry shortly before. Whether or no it would have been better policy to have abandoned it again after taking it is an open question, for it produced a most awkward salient in the line, exposed to shell-fire from all directions, and it cost us very dear to hold it. There was, moreover, no trench leading up to it from the rear, and the path to it was right across the open.

German Snipers.

At one point a little foot-bridge had to be crossed, and on this bridge a sniper had his rifle trained. Three dead men, who lay there, warned you that he had not been without success, and urged you to a rapid bolt to cover on the far side. At the end of the path, it was equally necessary to double into the trench. The Brigadier and Brigade Major had regular exercise nearly every morning in negotiating this obstacle race. The support trench which A Company occupied had the merit of being a trench, but there was a large space in the middle of it, which was quite untenable, and useless to repair, as the Boche had the range of it to a nicety, and, as fast as it was built up, he blew it to pieces again. Even here, too, snipers watched the gap and rendered it inadvisable to show your head over the parapet. On the left this trench ended in the ruins of a house and on the right joined the one communication trench which the sector owned and which led up to the extreme right of B Company. Behind it lay some farm

buildings, in which the signallers under Corpl. Grant had an intermediate station, on the edge of the Cinque Rue—a road pitted with great shell-holes. Farther behind still the country was a desolate waste.

For the next two days we put up with fairly constant shelling on the part of the Huns, which was most severe on the front line, and was the more galling as the enemy so obviously had the supremacy in the matter of artillery, our replies being infrequent and ineffective. Snipers, too, were exasperatingly active. Captain Ramsay wisely set his company to work to erect a new sandbag wall behind the mound, and so gain a little further protection from shell-splinters. He was unlucky in losing Lieut. Cumming, who exposed himself at the parapet and was wounded in the hand and chest. This was our first casualty among the officers. There were, in addition, about 18 casualties among the men during this tour.

On the night of June 6th we were relieved by the 5th Seaforths and returned to Lacouture, where the Quartermaster and Transport Officer had been quartered during our stay in the line, journeying up nightly with the rations. After settling down here, we were promptly ordered to change our abode and move to the village of Le Touret, about 1½ miles nearer the line, where officers and men alike slept and fed "en plein air." This was all very well till the next day, when the weather, which till then had been hot and sunny, broke suddenly in a tremendous thunderstorm, and literally flooded us all out. As a result of this, we received permission to move back to the billets we had quitted the day before.

Rain and Mud.

On June 10th we once more moved up to the trenches in sheets of rain. Our troubles began when we were loaded up with sandbags at the Indian village to be taken up to the 8th Argylls in the front line. The night was pitch dark; the rain continued in torrents; while the slippery mud made the going very difficult for the heavily laden men. Men had constantly to be hauled by main force from shell-holes full of mud and water, into which they had fallen in the dark. When at last we reached the communication trenches, progress was even slower, and the way seemed interminable. Constant messages passed up and down the line—"Is every one in touch in rear?" "Pass the word up, move on in front," and so forth. However, the end was reached eventually and the sandbags dumped. We then turned back to find our positions in the reserve trenches, and very unpleasant and muddy they were. Our three days in these trenches were not rendered very enjoyable by accurate shelling, which caused several casualties, or by the very arduous fatigues which nightly fell to our lot. No one can pretend to enjoy carrying a great sheet of corrugated

iron up a mile of trench ankle deep in mud. However, the men's spirits were excellent, and they bore the discomforts nobly, even on a diet of bully-beef and water.

Casualties Among Officers.

Battalion Headquarters, situated near the Indian village, also had their full share of excitement. Their breakfast, laid ready outside their dug-out, was blown into the air by a shell one morning, and later on the same day the Adjutant, Captain Doig, was wounded in the arm. His place was taken by Captain W. Macdonald, and Lieut. Kennedy succeeded him as officer commanding C Company. The same day we also heard tidings of the unfortunate accidents which occurred to Lieuts. Petrie and Sulley at a bombing school. The latter was unlucky enough to lose one eye. A Company lost the services of Lieut. Polley, who was also wounded, but his wound was more nerve-shaking than severe, and fortunately only necessitated a week's rest at the transport lines.

On June 13th we relieved the 8th Argylls in the front line sector, and found that they had made valiant attempts to improve the bad conditions. The Companies occupied the same places as they had done before.

The next day was saddened by the death of Lieut. David Stewart, who was shot through the heart by a sniper. The loss of this charming companion and efficient officer was deeply regretted by all who knew him.

Several further losses among the men were also incurred on that day from shell-fire, but the following day, June 15th, was to bring a severer ordeal for every one than they had yet been called upon to face.

Heavy Fighting and Many Casualties.

Early in the morning we heard rumours that there was something on. The Colonel and Major Gair soon came up to the support trench, and we found out all there was to be known. Over on our right our allies the French were to make a big attack, while the 51st Division was to make a holding attack and demonstration to distract the enemy's attention and keep his reserves and his artillery away from the threatened sector. The 154th Brigade, on the right of the Division, composed of the 6th Scottish Rifles and Lancashire troops, was to go over the parapet, while one company of the 5th Seaforths was also to go over on their left, forming the extreme left flank of the attack. The attack was timed for 6 p.m., and the Battalion's job on the left of the 5th Seaforths was to man the parapet with every available man and open rapid fire on the enemy's trenches so as to give covering fire to the attacking troops and keep the enemy's heads down. All day our guns kept up a bombardment on the enemy's positions. Though compared with the standards we learnt later it was but a feeble apology for a

barrage, still at that time it was a pleasant change for us to watch the enemy getting more than he gave. The shrapnel on the enemy's front line, unfortunately, had little effect, and certainly did not succeed in cutting any wire, but the heavier shells were making good practice on the rear positions, where they could be seen bursting on the gentle slopes that led back to where in the distance could be seen those huge iron structures—known as the Tower Bridge—which were to become so well known later in the year at the battle of Loos. It was comforting to hear old "Granny" rumbling along overhead to burst in the distance in a mighty column of black or yellow smoke.



CAPT. LYLE FRASER, M.C.

Shortly before 6 o'clock the enemy's guns started to reply on our front line with some violence, not forgetting the C.T., where the company of the 5th Seaforths was lying in readiness to go over the top. Every one took what cover they could till the hour fixed, but punctually at 6 p.m. B, C, and D. Companies rushed up to the parapet and opened rapid fire, while the attacking troops started. The Division achieved its object, but with heavy loss, and the attack of the French proved successful. The 154th Brigade succeeded in penetrating two lines of trenches, but later had to return to their original trenches through lack of reserves and ammunition. The 5th

Seaforths were met with a murderous fire directly they moved from the trench, and, losing half their numbers and three officers, were compelled to lie down in No Man's Land in the long grass and wait for darkness to enable them to get back. Nor did our battalion fare more happily. I have already described what little cover there was, and how the line was a salient. Added to this, the trench was crowded—there was nearly a man for every yard. Consequently the enemy's shrapnel, which swept down the trench in enfilade, did terrible execution, and men fell thick and fast. Captain Ramsay was almost immediately shot through the arm while watching the attack through his field-glasses. Lieut. Fraser, who ably took command of his company and led them through the rest of that trying evening and night, was afterwards rewarded with the M.C. D Company in the orchard suffered very badly from the enemy's heavy Minenwerfer, which fired large shells from a mortar in the trench with persistent accuracy. These burst with a nerve-shattering crash and concussion, flattening out the breast-work trench where they fell, and either blowing the occupants to bits or burying them under the debris. Lieut. Fysh worked with indefatigable courage in digging out men from under the wreckage, while all the time exposed to the fire of these murderous monsters.

The enemy's bombardment continued for three hours, when it abated, and we had time to look around us. The place was a veritable shambles, for the Battalion's casualties on that day amounted to 140, among whom were many valuable N.C.O.'s.

The marvellous thing was that no more officers were hit. During the night the 5th Seaforths were ordered to make another attempt on the enemy's line, but met with no better success than before, and spent the rest of the night in getting in their wounded from No Man's Land.

The work of the Battalion stretcher-bearers on this occasion was heroic. The way down to the dressing-station in the Indian village was very long, and was across the open, exposed to constant shell fire. The bearers worked incessantly, and some of them made eleven journeys, both by night and in broad daylight. It was nearly 24 hours before the last of the wounded was removed from the front line, and it is much to be feared that several succumbed to the exposure of the cold right as they lay in the front trench before they could be removed. Among the stretcher-bearers particularly worthy of mention were Drummer Fraser, who was awarded the D.C.M., and Piper Lumsden. Nor must we forget the devotion of the doctor, Major Campbell, who worked almost uninterruptedly all night and next day in attending to the wounded as they were brought in.



DRUMMER W. FRASER, D.C.M.

About midnight A Company was brought up into the firing line to make good the losses which the other companies had sustained.

For two more days the weary Battalion held the line. For a week we had not had our

clothes off, or any chance of a good wash, and sleep had been scanty. Many of the men were quite unrecognisable with the heavy beards they had grown. On the night of the 17th, to our great joy, the 6th Argylls came up to relieve us, inquiring, as they entered the line, in the real Paisley tongue: "Have you got any good dug outs here? We're a great mob for sleeping!" The ration of rum with which we were issued on reaching Lacouture was very comforting.

Back to the Trenches.

After only one day's rest, we found ourselves back in the trenches on June 19th, relieving the Gordons of the 153rd Brigade in the sector just to the right of the previous one, where the 154th Brigade had gone over to the attack. A Company was in the front line, with the other companies in support and reserve. Lieut. Hudson, who had returned from hospital, had been placed in command of A Company, while Captain Legge returned to command the now almost officerless B Company.

This sector proved very quiet, and nothing especial occurred during our three days in it. On the second night, the Companies were interchanged, C Company coming into the front line in place of A Company. On June 22nd we were relieved and had a long march to Pacaut, where we billeted once more, again in sheets of rain.

Around this village the whole Brigade, having been withdrawn from the line, was concentrated.

Laventie and the Move to the Somme.

Two days' rest only was vouchsafed to the Battalion before it restarted its nomadic habits and marched to Estaires, arriving there about midnight. Here it was met by the advanced party—Lieuts. Mackay and Peel and some N.C.O.'s—who had proceeded thither the day before on a motor bus to view the new sector of trenches near Laventie, held by the 2nd Middlesex, and to make the billeting arrangements. Great was the joy of all ranks to find themselves once more in a town with pavements and shops. Though the Germans had been in Estaires earlier in the war, it was now well behind the lines and practically undamaged. The café in the centre of the town provided quite a good dinner, and it was even possible to obtain a whisky and soda there, as long as you were careful not to mention the word whisky, but called it "vin blanc écossais."

"Bonny Mary o' Argyll."

On Saturday, June 25th, the Colonel and Adjutant rode up to inspect the trenches, and were much surprised to find that it was possible to take your horse right up to the farm, where Battalion Headquarters was situated—less than a mile from the line. Next day, after divine service, the Battalion marched up to take over the new trenches. These were situated just in front of the ruins of the village of Fauquissart, and the left of the Battalion was at a well-known spot called Red Lamp Corner, held by the 8th Argylls. This post ran out considerably in front of the line held by the Battalion, and the red lamp was lighted by night presumably to warn you not to shoot into their backs. All four Companies were in the line, with A Company on the left and D Company on the right. The trenches were breastworks as at Festubert, but had been little

shelled and were in good repair. The officers' shelters even boasted of beds, made with wood frames and wire-netting stretched across them. The enemy hardly shelled us at all, and our opponents were Saxons, who were all for a quiet life, but had one vice, namely, their persistent and accurate sniping, which effectually kept our heads down and forced us to rely on periscopes. This sniping was responsible for the only two casualties the Battalion suffered during the tour. It was, in fact, quite a health resort after our last experiences. Only one incident of interest occurred. The R.E.'s on the morning of the 30th exploded three mines under the enemy's trenches to our left. The enemy's retaliation was mercifully feeble. It is interesting to record that the enemy apparently knew all about the fact that we were coming into this part of the line, and it is even reported that when the 8th Argylls entered the trenches a German band struck up "Bonny Mary o' Argyll."

Captain A. D. Macdonald returned during this tour of duty and took over command of A Company.

On being relieved on July 3rd by the 5th Seaforths, the Battalion moved back into reserve billets in farm-houses along the Rue de Bacquerot—only a little more than a mile from the trenches. One Company manned a reserve post by night, while another acted as an inlying picquet, ready for immediate action. Each night large working parties were supplied for the improvement of the defences of the front line system, and a tremendous amount of good spade-work was put in. There were no casualties during these fatigues, but one or two men were hit by spent bullets coming from the line while sleeping in their bivouacs, and D Company were unlucky enough to lose Captain Young, who was severely wounded in the leg when standing outside his dug-out. On July 7th we received our first draft of officers—Lieutenants A. H. Macgregor, who came to A Company; Alexander, who went to B; Lee and A. H. Macdonald, posted to C Company; and E. J. Anderson, to D Company.

The Luxury of the Bath.

After we had completed our six days in reserve, the Brigade was relieved by the 154th Brigade, and the Battalion marched back by Companies to billets in farms west of Laventie. Here a pleasant six days were spent, only somewhat marred by the nightly working parties which the Battalion had to supply for the front trenches. A few casualties were incurred. One delight, which every one appreciated, was a hot bath in a factory at La Gorgue, the first really good bath we had since we left home. Some of us also paid a visit to the 4th Seaforths, who were then billeted in Estaires. Captain Cook, who was working as Brigade transport officer, had an accident while riding, and had to go to hospital, eventually getting over to England. We

also lost Lieut. Thompson, the machine-gun officer, who for some time had been in bad health, and now went to hospital. Our medical officer, Major Campbell, was promoted to the command of an ambulance train, and was replaced by Captain Mackay.

"A Navvies' Battalion?"

On the 15th of July, the Battalion relieved the 6th Black Watch in the trenches, just a little way to the right of our previous position. Very little occurred during this week in the line, except the usual sniping and a certain amount of activity on the part of the enemy's light trench mortars. These were usually fired at night, and were easily visible during their passage through the air owing to their burning fuse. All Companies sent out small patrols by night in order to try and silence some of the snipers who lay out in the open. A good deal more digging was also performed, which made some of the men ask the question: "Are we to be turned into a Navvies' Battalion?"

On relief, on July 22nd, the Battalion trekked back to Merville in the inevitable rain, which always seemed to dog our footsteps whenever we came out of or went into the trenches. A town with good estaminets was again welcomed by all, and soon put every one's tail up. The officers enjoyed a good dinner at the principal café to celebrate the newly gazetted captaincies of Lieut. Hudson and Lieut. Boyd. Lieut. G. S. Stewart now said good-bye to the Battalion on joining a trench mortar battery. The hard work done by the Battalion in the Fanguissart sector was commended by the Corps Commander in his farewell order to the Brigade. He complimented General Ross on having left the sector twice as strong as he had found it. This praise was welcome after the laborious nights of hard digging.

On the Somme.

On July 26th we marched to La Gorgue and entrained. We were all very curious as to our destination, of which none of us, except perhaps the H.Q. Staff, had any idea. Some optimists suggested that the Territorials were being withdrawn from France to make way for the New Army, and that we were going home. However, we soon found this was not so, when we passed Calais, whence we could actually see the coast of England from our carriages—so near and yet so far. Passing through Boulogne and Amiens at a good steady pace of about ten miles an hour—the usual rate of progress for French troop trains—we eventually detrained at the large village of Corbie on the River Somme in the small hours of the morning. From here we marched to billets at Pont Noyelles, a pretty little village with a splendid lake, in which we bathed with great delight. The inhabitants

were very friendly and cordially welcomed "les Ecossais." No British troops had been billeted there before, for we were now in a new country.

The day after our arrival the Battalion was inspected by General Munro, commanding the Third Army, who complimented the Colonel on his Battalion.

Here we were joined by Captain Asher, who took command of B Company, and Lieut. M. Macpherson, who came to A Company. Captain Legge and Lieut. Polley started for home on a week's leave, much to the envy of the rest of us.

Bouzincourt.

On July 29th we took the road again, moving up towards the line near the town of Albert. As we passed through the villages with our pipers playing, all the inhabitants and the French troops turned out to cheer us on our way. Our destination was the little village of Bouzincourt, where we spent the night. This was our first introduction to the place we were to see so much of in the coming months; in fact, it almost became a home to us. Situated on the ridge west of Albert and the River Ancre, Bouzincourt commanded a wide view of the country eastwards. Down

in the valley lay the town of Albert, its half-ruined cathedral with the drooping virgin and child standing out conspicuously in its midst. Behind it again stretched another high ridge, beyond which lay the trenches. To the north-east could be seen the woods surrounding the villages of Aveluy and Martinsart. Very beautiful did the rolling country seem to our eyes, so long wearied with the monotonous mud flats of the north.

The village itself was a pleasant place, with its funny little church in the centre, flanked on either side by a pond, and with its numerous orchards and shady trees. The inhabitants were uniformly friendly, and many were the friendships that were soon to be struck up with them. One thing we noticed in their farms was the universal existence of rabbit hutches. If roast beef is the national diet of England, or the haggis of Scotland, the rabbit must certainly hold pre-eminence as the staple food of the people of Bouzincourt.

Another great advantage of the village was that, though only four miles from the line, it had been left immune from shell fire, and its walls presented none of those gaping holes which had so disfigured most of the villages we had known.

The Somme Country in 1915.

The evening after our arrival in Bouzincourt, July 30th, we marched up through the villages of Aveluy and Authuille to take over part of the line from the French in Thiepval wood, in accordance with the scheme, now in operation, of the extension southwards of the British front. Captain A. D. Macdonald and Lieut. Mackay, who had preceded us to the trenches the previous day, were entertained right royally by their French hosts, and after an excellent dinner in the Headquarters dug-out, were persuaded to sing Scots songs in honour of the occasion. All the French officers were equally agreeable when the Battalion arrived, and did all they could to make the relief pass off successfully and to acquaint us with the details of the sector. Conversations were carried on in a mixture of bad French and bad English, but I regret to record my opinion that the Colonel eclipsed us all, when attempting to explain to the French Commandant his desire to make A Company extend their frontage a little to the left. The French Commandant, with the best intentions in the world, could make nothing of "Extendez à la gauche!" We eventually said good-bye to the last of the French poilus at about 5 a.m. Some of the French artillery remained behind us for about a week, and very business-like and efficient we found their seventy-fives to be.

"Sumptuous" Trenches.

The sector we were now in merits a short description. The line ran along the eastern edge of Thiepval wood, which, by the way, was still a wood, green with summer foliage, and not merely a collection of shattered stumps. Three companies held the front—A, B, and D from right to left—with C Company and Battalion Headquarters farther back in the wood in support. The trenches were all dug out of the chalk to a depth of about five feet, and, compared with those we had previously held, were sumptuous in the extreme. There were good fire-stepped firebays, strong traverses, and a travel trench, for movement up and down the trench, about ten yards behind. There was sufficient dug-out accommodation for all the men, the shelters in some cases being nearly 15 feet under ground and strong enough to keep out a direct hit by a five-nine. Another advantage of these chalk trenches, as opposed to the breastworks, was that a shell had to land actually in the trench to do much damage, whereas a shell-burst anywhere near a breastwork would make a great breach in the sandbags, and spray the line with splinters.

For the further defence of the line, long saps had been dug out towards the German lines at intervals, going forward as far as the outer

edge of our barbed wire. The ends of these saps were always manned by night. Another curious contrivance was a line of high posts in front of the trenches, with wire netting stretched along them, the idea of which was to stop bombs, if an enemy bombing party made a raid under cover of night.

Directly opposite the right of the Battalion's sector was the ruined chateau of Thiepval, surrounded by trees, and on its left were the remains of the small village of Thiepval, through which the German lines ran—about 400 yards from our own trenches and on the forward slope of the ridge. About half-a-mile behind our trenches ran the swamp of the River Ancre, curving round on our extreme left towards the German lines and forming the dividing line between us and the 4th Division. In the refreshing cold water of the river one could and did bathe with perfect safety. Here also the men had good sport with their rifles at duck and other water fowl, till they got careless, and the indiscriminate shooting became so dangerous that it had to be stopped. On the left of the sector the slope of the wood up from the Ancre to the trenches was very steep indeed, and I often wondered what would happen to the Company there if the Boche succeeded in ousting them from their trench. There was nothing behind them except this steep descent into the Ancre.

"Elgin Avenue."

Battalion Headquarters, in the middle of the wood, presented a beautiful sylvan aspect, boasting a little arbour with rustic table and benches for afternoon tea. The dug-outs, it is true, were not very strong, but luckily only light shells were ever fired at them, and only very few of these. An excellent communication trench, afterwards named Elgin Avenue, led up from Headquarters to the centre of the front line.

From the point of view of the Quartermaster and Transport Officer too, the sector was excellent. Everything could be brought up by road to the Battalion dump near Headquarters, near which all the companies had excellent cook-houses sheltered from view by the convenient slope.

The padre also made his home at Battalion Headquarters, where he ran a canteen for the benefit of the men. Being Mess President, he was also made responsible for the Battalion cow, which had been handed over to us by the French. By day it used to graze on the meadows near the river, while at night it came up to its own dug-out in the wood, and daily provided Battalion Headquarters with fresh milk.

A Parley with the Boches.

In these trenches we stayed for 15 days, and only had one man killed the whole time. The weather was beautiful, except for one violent thunderstorm. Our real enemies were the

multitudinous mosquitoes, which devoured our bare knees, and the enormous rats, which ran over our faces as we slept, for the Boches opposite us were of a most peaceful nature and their shelling negligible. This was a good thing, for so was ours. As a matter of fact, the enemy were apparently under the impression for a long time that the French were still there. It was only on the last morning of our stay that they came by night and planted a pole, with a message and a German newspaper, a little way in front of our trenches. This pole was brought in and was found to contain the words: "Gentlemen, please to exchange newspapers daily, as before." Unfortunately, the interpreter, M. Gazères, took it into his head to return the compliment, and, accompanied by one lance-corporal, he went right across No Man's Land, waving an English newspaper. Not a shot was fired, and when he reached the German trench, two Germans came out and talked to him. After exchanging their views about the war—the Germans expressed a pious hope that it would not last another winter—both parties withdrew to their own line. Imagine the wrath of Major Gair, who had just come up to the front line with officers of the Indian Cavalry, who were to relieve us, on seeing the whole Battalion perched in trees watching these strange happenings! The interpreter got into serious trouble over this escapade and was soon afterwards transferred from our Battalion.

During one day of our stay we had a portion of one of the New Army battalions of the Essex Regiment in our trenches for instruction.

A good deal of useful patrolling work in No Man's Land was also carried out by all companies in this sector.

On the night of the 13th/14th we were relieved by the Indian Cavalry. We were much impressed by the weight-carrying capacities of these Indians, particularly the officers' batmen. They came into the trenches loaded with simply enormous bundles. After completing the relief, we marched back to Bouzincourt, where we spent a happy week's rest, not, however, without the usual working parties by night and an inspection by the Brigadier. The night fatigues, as usual, meant a very hard night's work. Parading at 6 p.m., the parties used to return about 2 a.m., having accomplished eight miles' marching and four hours' digging. The chief work done was the construction of a long communication trench running from in front of Albert to the trenches at La Boisselle. While superintending one of these fatigues Captain Legge was hit through the lung by a stray bullet, and returned to England. Captain Hudson, who had been in command of D Company in the trenches, also had to go to hospital again with gastritis.

A Battalion concert was organised by the padre and took place in a large barn. This proved a great success, and a good deal of talent was displayed. Some of the men during their off hours played vigorous games of rounders, excellent exercise to work off the muscle stiffening effect of the trenches.

Albert.

On August 21st we moved up to billets in Albert, being in reserve to the rest of the Brigade who were holding the very nasty trenches round La Boisselle and Bécourt. A Company sent up two platoons to Bécourt chateau, where the Headquarters of the 5th Seaforths were, to act as supports to them. These platoons were employed in constructing a redoubt for the defence of Bécourt chateau. After four days they were relieved by two platoons of B Company. The rest of the Battalion was employed in extensive improvement of the front trenches held by the 6th and 8th Argylls, round about the dangerous locality of La Boisselle. Here the opposing trenches were often only 20 or 30 yards apart, on the opposite lips of great mine craters, and both sides kept up a hot fire with trench mortars, rifle, and hand grenades. Our working parties in this area suffered a good many casualties. Albert itself was quite a pleasant spot to live in and was not much shelled. Battalion Headquarters inhabited a delightful large chateau with an excellent garden, afterwards occupied by General Byng as Headquarters of the Third Army.

On September 1st the whole Brigade was relieved by the 153rd Brigade, the 7th Gordons taking over our billets from us, while we once more sought quarters in Bouzincourt, where we stayed for ten days, carrying out the usual working parties. Another Battalion concert was held, this time attended by the Brigadier and his staff.

On the 7th our first draft, 63 other ranks from the Reserve Battalion, joined the Battalion and were incorporated in the various companies. Leave was now in full swing, and several of the senior and married warrant officers and N.C.O.'s enjoyed a brief visit to their homes. Sergeant Cross and Sergeant Macgregor, of A Company, who had done good service in the line, were promoted to commissioned rank, and, after a few days' leave, rejoined A and B Companies respectively as officers.

From September 12th to the 17th the Brigade was again in the trenches, our Battalion relieving the 7th Gordons in the sector previously held by the 5th Seaforths in front of Bécourt chateau. A, C, and D Companies were in the front trenches and B Company in support. This tour was uneventful, except that we had two companies of the 14th King's Liverpool Regiment in with us for instruction.

Casualties were very few, and our relief by the 7th Battalion West Kents took place without incident.

Our five days' rest at Bouzincourt was marked by a route march on September 20th, when we marched past General Munro at Henencourt chateau. He was then in command of the Third Army, to which we now belonged.

The next tour of the trenches, starting on September 21st, was a little more exciting. We took over yet another bit of the line in this area, from the 154th Brigade, on a pronounced salient round the eastern outskirts of the woods north-east of Aveluy, that is between the two sectors we had previously held. All four companies were in the line, but even so, A Company were holding nearly 800 yards of trenches. The trenches were quite good, but, owing to the salient, rather exposed to indirect machine-gun fire. The enemy's trenches varied in distance from 300 yards to nearly 800 yards on the extreme right. The system of saps was again in evidence. Our artillery was now very active and carried out quite a heavy bombardment on the opposing trenches every afternoon, in the hope of deluding them into the belief that an attack was intended in this sector. It was now common knowledge that a big attack was to be made by our troops near Loos within the next few days, and it was our job to try and prevent the Germans from sending away reserves from in front of us. The enemy's retaliation to our bombardments was not effective. He seemed to have only light guns at his disposal, and these chiefly fired away back into the wood near Battalion Headquarters, called Leedos or the White City. Here they did little damage except that they sometimes made dents in the light railway which was used for bringing up rations and stores. The Boche also had some aerial torpedoes which he fired at us, but their effect was more moral than physical.

A Ruse.

On September 25th the first reports received of the battle of Loos were very encouraging, and the Brigade arranged a little stunt for the benefit of the Boche opposite us. At the hour of stand-to, just as dusk was falling, every man in the line stood up at the parapet and gave vent to a simultaneous burst of cheering, at the same time displaying dummy figures over the top to make it look as if an attack was in progress. This was a complete success. The Boche lost his head completely, manned his parapets and opened rapid fire. He was even seen to be hurrying up reserves over the open. He kept the firing up for half an hour before he realised he was being made a fool of. The only effect he had was to kill one poor old woman who was sleeping in her bed at Aveluy. Unfortunately the artillery had not been informed of the plan, or they could have fired

with effect into the enemy's crowded trenches. An attempt to repeat the performance next morning, in co-operation with the artillery, was a complete frost. The Boche utterly refused to "rise," and treated the outburst with entire indifference.

One of the few casualties of this tour was Captain Boyd, who had recently taken over the duties of machine-gun officer. He was slightly wounded in the face, but, owing to the clearance of all hospitals before the battle of Loos, he was sent over to England.

September 26th found us relieved by the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers and once more back in Bouzincourt, where the installation of hot baths was much appreciated.

On the 28th, General Harper, the new commander of the 51st Division, inspected the Battalion, General Sir Bannantine-Allason, who had commanded us since the early days in Bedford, having given up his command to take up duty at home.

During October we had two more spells in the Thiepval wood sector, each lasting ten days. These passed without incident, except that the Boche had been stirred to retaliation by our shelling and used to fire salvoes of trench mortars at the right of our line from the ruins of the chateau. D Company, on the left, also did good work by patrols, particularly in investigating a mill, which lay out in No Man's Land, and was often visited by the enemy. These two tours were broken by a ten days' rest in Bouzincourt, during which we supplied the usual working parties and also carried out a route march and a tactical scheme, involving the use of the new pattern of smoke helmets for our protection against gas. The Gordons and Black Watch of the 153rd Brigade alternated with us in our moves.

Trench Miseries.

After the second ten days in the line, we spent the first week of November at Bouzincourt, where a draft of 27 joined us, and then found it our turn to be the supporting battalion of the Brigade in the line. A and D Companies took over from the Liverpool Irish behind the 6th Argylls at Donnet Post, directly in front of Aveluy, while B and C Companies were behind the 5th Seaforths at Lesdos, farther to the left in Aveluy wood. Five days were spent in these positions, and some casualties were sustained from shell fire. Furthermore, the weather had absolutely broken, and constant rain had made the trenches in an appalling condition. In this area most of the trenches were of mud, not chalk, and they were consequently a sea of liquid, sticky mud about knee-deep. All our time was thus spent in heart-breaking, futile endeavours to drain a little of the water away and lay duckboard paths along the communication trenches. Conditions were so bad that, after five days, we relieved the 5th Seaforths

in the front line to the east of Aveluy wood. Things were worse than ever here, and were not improved by a fall of snow. The trenches and several of the dug-outs were falling in in all directions, the mud was thigh-deep, and what dug-outs were left had their floors about as muddy as the trench itself. It was also very cold. It was no uncommon incident to see men stuck fast in the trench, unable to pull their legs out of the glutinous mud, till hauled out by their comrades. Gumboots were issued to us, but they soon became wet through or disappeared in the mud. We were also told to change our socks daily and rub whale oil on to our feet to prevent frostbite. Unfortunately the men always complained that this whale oil made their feet feel colder than ever, and did not see much use in changing their socks when there was no place to wash or dry their feet in, and the new pair of socks were as wet as the old inside ten minutes. Despite these conditions the Brigadier used to visit us daily in the front line, and cheer us up by pointing to the German trenches, which were considerably lower than ours, and saying "that if we were up to our thighs, the other blighters must be up to their necks in mud."

During this tour Captains Petrie and Jack and a draft of 17 other ranks joined the Battalion, and they were badly needed, for the wastage from sickness was becoming serious, trench fever and chills carrying off numerous victims to hospital. We were very glad, after five days in this mud, to hand over the trenches to the 5th Gordons and retire to Bouzincourt to try and get clean again.

Two of the days of rest were spent in manning the cellars of Bouzincourt and the defences of Aveluy by way of practice. At Aveluy our divisional engineers had constructed the most elaborate system of trenches with a central keep, well protected and very strong.

Lieut. Hazelgrave now joined the Battalion and was at first attached to B Company, though he later became the bombing expert.

Another tour of duty in the Thiepval wood sector, where we relieved the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, lasted from November 28th to December 8th, and was chiefly remarkable for the attachment of platoons and companies of the 16th H.L.I. to us for instruction. These trenches were now much livelier, and A Company had to put up with a great deal of annoyance from the enemy's trench mortars, particularly the "oil-cans," great round tubs full of nails, horse-shoes, and any bits of old iron, which burst with an ear-splitting, terrific crash and caused very nasty wounds. They even succeeded in propelling two of their heavy mortars as far back as Battalion Headquarters, a distance of about 900 yards, where, however, they luckily did no damage, though the cow in her dug-out had a narrow escape. The

method employed of attaching the H.L.I. to us was first of all to send up officers and N.C.O.'s for a night, and then next night to bring up four complete platoons, who did a two days' spell, relieving four of our platoons, who left the trenches and spent the time under canvas at Martinsart. This was a poor game for the various platoon commanders concerned, for they were continually marching to and from the line, and could never settle down anywhere for more than two days at a time.

The next stage in the proceedings was the relief of two of our complete companies, A and B Companies, by two companies of the H.L.I. Thus Colonel Grant Smith held the line with two of his own companies and two of the H.L.I. companies under him.

Finally, on December 8th the whole Battalion was relieved and the H.L.I. took complete possession. Shortly before the relief, Lieut. Elliott arrived from home to join us, and was posted to A Company.

By various stages the whole Battalion congregated under canvas at Senlis. The idea of dwelling under canvas in December speaks for itself, and it is unnecessary to say more than that the camp was one large sea of mud, as were also the unboarded tents. However, Senlis was the abode of Divisional Headquarters and boasted good hot baths, and, more entertaining still, the "Balmorals," as the Divisional concert troupe were called. Their nightly performance attracted crowded houses, and one was always sure of amusing topical allusions from "Long Tom" (Lance-Corpl. Arthur Hay, of B Company), who doubtless found this employment a great relief after his experiences in the trenches.

Even more refreshing were the growing rumours of a rest for the Division away back from the line, a rumour to which the arrival of the H.L.I. lent probability.

On December 11th we moved into Divisional reserve in billets at Martinsart, and on our very first night had the ill-fortune to be shelled at 2 o'clock in the morning. Two unlucky shells went right through into the billets, killing one man and wounding thirteen others.

After fatigues on roads and trenches for five days, we went in for our final tour in this district on December 16th, relieving the 154th Brigade in the Aveluy wood sector, with the 153rd Brigade on our left and the 6th Argylls on our right. The state of the trenches was almost worse than ever, and the usual heart-breaking work of drainage had immediately to be started, added to which we had the task of instructing two companies of the 11th Border Regiment in their duties. Their first experience of trench warfare was indeed a sticky one. The enemy was doubtless as waterlogged as we were, and were not active, except at night, when their machine guns used to sweep our parapets with persistent accuracy. However, we were all in good spirits, for we had now been promised that the rest was a certainty, and this was our last tour in the trenches for a month or so.

On December 23rd, in pouring rain, the 16th H.L.I. relieved us, and we shook the dust (or rather mud) of the trenches off our feet as we plodded along the wearisome road to the village of Henencourt. Here we found comfortable, dry billets in barns, and soon made ourselves comfortable.

A Welcome Rest—The Labyrinth.

THUS fortunately housed, we spent our first Christmas in France, and we made it quite a merry one. The Quartermaster provided excellent hot dinners for all the men, supplemented by the Christmas puddings and other delicacies which were so kindly sent us by the Morayshire Comforts Committee, and were very greatly appreciated. Company concerts were also arranged and helped to pass the evening enjoyably. We thought with pity of the unfortunates in the trenches, and blessed our lucky stars that we were not among them.

On December 29th the Brigade started for the "rest area," moving in a westerly direction. Leaving Henencourt at 9 a.m., we reached our halting-place for the night—the village of St Gratien—about lunch time after a march of ten miles. The next morning

a short march of five miles took us to our destination, the village of Pierregot, which lay about ten miles to the north of Amiens and nearly twenty miles away from the trenches. The country round was pleasant and untouched by war, and the billets were good.

In these quarters we remained till February 8th, 1916, except for a week in the middle of January. Hogmanay was suitably celebrated—the officers danced a reel in the village street at midnight to the strains of the band—after which relaxation we settled down to good steady work in the way of training. Starting from platoon drill, we gradually worked up to battalion and brigade practice attacks, while great care was devoted to the training of the various specialists—such as bombers and machine gunners. Bayonet

fighting, musketry, and gas-helmet drill also had their fair share of time. Lieut. Sinclair, while teaching a squad to throw live bombs, was unfortunate enough to get a bomb splinter in the eye, and of course left us. Several route marches were performed and were very necessary owing to the effects of life in the trenches.

Lieut. A. R. Walker, who joined the Battalion at this time, was posted to A Company, which always seemed to be short of officers.

The period January 15th to 22nd was spent at Acheux, whither the Battalion marched, with the exception of various details who remained under Major Gair at Pierregot. Rather to the general disgust, it was found that we had been sent there to perform manual labour once more, a big railway cutting being in process of construction near Lealvillers. However, the hours were not too long, and the men soon settled down to the work with a will, earning the hearty commendation of the Engineers, who were supervising the work. After the week was completed, we marched back again to Pierregot.

Besides the work at Pierregot, plenty of time was allowed us for recreation. Football matches were played with great zest, D Company turning out a very useful side on to the field. One or two Rugby matches were also played. To pass the evenings, a number of successful concerts were arranged. Still more important, leave was being pushed on at a more rapid pace, and a very fair number of all ranks got away. Some of the less fortunate were able to find a little consolation in visits to Amiens, which really showed very little signs of war strain, although close to the line.

Only one draft joined us at Pierregot, and consisted of 34 other ranks, nearly all old hands, who returned to us after having gone down the line sick or wounded.

February 8th, 1916, saw the end of our stay at Pierregot, a stay which will certainly remain in the memory as one of the most pleasant periods of our service. On leaving Pierregot, we were not pushed direct to the line, but marched along the Somme valley to Corbie, where we billeted and continued our training, our numbers being further augmented by a draft of 67 other ranks on 17th February. The next day preparations were made for the line. A Company was hurried off and marched up to Etenehem, ready to move up towards the trenches at Frise. The march was a very exhausting one owing to the state of the roads, which had been rendered mere swamps by the recent rain and the heavy traffic. The Company had scarcely arrived at Etenehem before the intended arrangements were cancelled and they were ordered back again. After one day's rest, they returned to Corbie on February 20th.

Nine days more at Corbie were passed, chiefly in work for the R.E. at the railway

station at Daours, 300 men from the Battalion being employed daily in this manner.

Lieut.-Colonel Gair.

Before we left Corbie we had to say goodbye to our second-in-command, Major Gair, who was being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and was going home to take command of the 2/5th H.L.I. While pleased at his promotion, we were all sorry to lose a senior officer who had had such a lengthy connexion with the Battalion and whose experience in the 2nd Seaforths had been of such great value to us all when we arrived as new hands on active service. His place was taken by Captain W. Macdonald, the adjutant, who was promoted to the rank of Major. Lieut. R. T. Peel then became Adjutant, proceeding to the 3rd Army School at Flixecourt for a course before taking up his duties. While he was away, Lieut. A. H. Macgregor carried out the duties of adjutant. At this time the Company commanders were—A Company, Captain A. D. Macdonald; B Company, Captain J. Macdougall; C Company, Captain W. R. Petrie; D Company, Captain J. A. C. Mackay.

Besides these changes in the Battalion, a change in the constitution of the Division had also been effected. The Lancashire Brigade had left us and the 154th Brigade was reformed with Highland battalions, including some of the original battalions of the Division who had gone out separately from Bedford. This Brigade was now composed of the 4th Seaforths, 7th Argyll and Sutherlands, the 9th Royal Scots, and the 4th Gordons.

On February 29th the Battalion marched back to Pierregot, whence, after one night, it moved to the next village—Rainneville. Here Captain J. A. Kennedy became the Brigade Gas Officer, and started a school for instruction in the use of gas and the various forms of protection against it. Shortly afterwards he was appointed Divisional Gas Officer and left the Battalion altogether.

On March 6th preparations were made in earnest for our early return to the line, and the whole Brigade marched to Beauval. An advanced party of officers were taken up by motor bus to see over the new area of trenches—the famous Labyrinth. On the next day the Commanding Officer and Second-in-Command also went up to the line. On the 9th an 11-mile march to Ivergny was accomplished, and on the 10th a 15-mile march to Duisans. This second day was one of the coldest we had yet experienced in France, and the wind penetrated even our sheepskin jackets. One night's sleep at Duisans, and the next evening found us trudging up once more to the line, where the Brigade took over the Labyrinth sector from the 78th Regiment of the French. Our battalion was the centre of the three in the line, and we had the 8th Argylls on our left and the 5th Seaforths on

our right. The number of our officers was increased by the arrival of Captain Boyd, recovered from his wound, and Lieutenants D. M. Macpherson and W. Matheson.

At our backs were the villages of Anzin and Marœuil, while the trenches themselves were in a hollow plateau, the ground sloping upwards again on the enemy's side, forming the well-known Vimy Ridge on our left and showing us the tops of the villages of Farbus and Thelus on our immediate front. On our right again the ground sloped downwards towards the ruins of the village of Roëlincourt.

A Maze of Trenches.

Roughly 1000 yards from the front line and parallel to it ran a main road—the road from Arras to Neuville St Vaast—and on it was situated advanced Brigade Headquarters, a sumptuous dug-out known as Ariane Post, which had been the Regimental Headquarters of the French. In front of this in the plateau lay a perfect maze of trenches, and our first acquaintance of them showed how apt the name Labyrinth was. Over the whole area the French and Germans had been engaged in heavy hand-to-hand fighting during 1915, and as each side gained a little advantage fresh trenches were dug and consolidated, probably only to be abandoned later when a counter-attack redressed the balance. Consequently one found derelict trenches leading off in all directions, guarded with hastily erected belts of wire and in many cases full of decomposed corpses, both German and French. Our difficulties were not helped by a shortage of maps, and those that did exist were none too accurate. We held the sector in depth. In front was a line of isolated posts, held by sentry groups of a N.C.O. and three or four men. Behind this was the main firing line and Company Headquarters, with another support line about 100 yards in rear. Farther behind again was a reserve trench and Battalion Headquarters. The trenches were of chalk and in fairly good repair, though many wanted deepening. Dug-outs were fairly numerous and for the most part deep, though several, having been constructed by the Germans, had their entrances facing the wrong way—that is, towards the enemy—which, of course, presented a considerable risk of shells or mortars dropping right in the entrance and blowing in the dug-out. Several of the front posts ran out to within 50 or 60 yards of the German front line. Before they left, the French warned us of the dangerous mining activity of the enemy in the sector—they assured us that there were "beaucoup des mines, qui vont pouffer" (this with an expressive gesture).

During our first day in the line we found the German sentries to be very bold—they used to stand up in their trenches to look over the parapet, exposing themselves down to the waist. Some accurate sniping soon

put a stop to this impertinence, and on the second day only heads were to be seen. Further accurate sniping soon taught the Germans that periscopes were safer, and periscopes were soon all that we ever saw of our friends the enemy. The Germans were also active, and shell fire caused us some ten casualties. Even the transport were assailed by shells when bringing up the rations, and C.Q.M.S. Templeton and two others were wounded. Further reinforcements arrived—Lieuts. Bennett and Christie and 45 other ranks from the base, so that the Battalion was rapidly becoming up to strength again. On March 17th a readjustment of the Brigade front took place, the front line now being taken over by two battalions only, while we moved into Brigade support at Ariane. After two days here we were relieved by the 8th Argylls and moved back for six days into billets at Marœuil.

The Brigade arrangements were now that each battalion should do six days in the line, six days in support trenches, six days in the line, and then six days' rest in billets at Marœuil, and so on in rotation. This rotation continued more or less regularly till the end of May.

From March 25th to April 6th we held the right sector of the Brigade front, relieving the 5th Seaforths, and having the 6th Argylls on our left and the 154th Brigade on our right. Both on the 26th and the 31st the enemy exploded mines—luckily not on our front—and caused several casualties to the 6th Argylls and the 5th Gordons. The accompanying bombardments extended to our trenches, but we escaped with few casualties. Apart from hand bombing and rifle grenade strafes, nothing else remarkable occurred. A good deal of work was accomplished on the improvement of the trenches. A further draft of 67 arrived, but were left with the Transport at Marœuil.

Lieut. M'Killigan, another new arrival, was attached to D Company.

The twelve days in the line instead of six was rendered necessary for us owing to the heavy casualties sustained by the 6th Argylls.

Our stay at Marœuil from April 6th to the 12th was largely occupied with instruction in bombing for the recently arrived drafts; and our next six days in the line passed without any particular incidents, though we sustained eleven casualties, chiefly from trench-mortar fire. As usual, we had two companies in the front line and two in support. While in Brigade support from April 18th-25th we supplied large working parties daily for the front line.

The Mines Explosion—28th April, 1916.

Our next tour in the line provided us with the most unpleasant episode since Festubert. On the 26th we heard heavy shelling taking place on our left, where the enemy strongly attacked the 25th Division on the Vimy Ridge.

An ominous calm brooded over our trenches, which was to be rudely shattered on the 28th. At 2 a.m. the enemy exploded seven mines simultaneously under our front line, most of them under the trenches held by Captain A. D. Macdonald and A Company. A very heavy barrage was put down at the same time on our support lines. Under cover of this barrage the Boche attacked, armed with rifle grenades and knobkerries and bringing up a machine gun to cover his advance. Doubtless he expected easily to overwhelm a demoralised garrison and make his way into our support lines. Several of the front posts were blown into the air with their garrisons. Those that remained put up a brave defence—as the traces of blood found afterwards proved—but they were overwhelmed and taken prisoners, mostly wounded. But when the enemy tried to advance farther he found himself stubbornly resisted. A and B Companies manned the fire-trench and hurled showers of bombs and rifle grenades at the advancing Germans with such good success that, after a sharp struggle, the enemy gave up the attempt and retired with considerable loss. The gallantry of the two Companies, A and B, was beyond praise in this affair, perhaps more particularly A Company, upon whom fell the brunt of the attack after they had received so severe a shaking from the explosion of the mines.

Lieut. Cross, M.C.

Both Company Commanders, Captains Macdonald and Macdougall, behaved with great gallantry, while conspicuous bravery was shown by Lieut. Cross, for which he was subsequently awarded the Military Cross. Rushing out of his dug-out, which was very nearly blown in by the mines, to get to his platoon, he immediately fell to the bottom of a deep mine crater in the darkness and was at once pounced upon by three Germans, one of whom sat on his stomach and belaboured him over the head with a knobkerry, crying out in English, "Give in, give in." Though half-stunned, Lieut. Cross succeeded in getting one hand free and fired his revolver four times, killing two Germans and wounding another. On the arrival of more Germans he lay as if dead, and though at first they started to drag him away, they eventually left him and went to help their wounded comrade. Lieut. Cross seized his chance and bolted up the side of the crater—only to fall to the bottom again, so broken and slippery was the loose earth. However, a second attempt took him on to our trench, where, after a temporary collapse, he joined the garrison in repelling the German attack with bombs. After all was over, he was found to have an enormous lump on his forehead as big as a hen's egg—in fact, his

life was only saved by his steel helmet. On going to hospital, he developed concussion and was sent to England.

Lieut. A. R. Walker and several N.C.O.'s and men of both Companies were specially complimented on their gallant behaviour by the Divisional General.

Boche Disappointment.

Another factor which helped greatly to upset the Boche's calculations was the excellent work of our artillery. Immediately the mines exploded, our artillery liaison officer in our trenches telephoned to his batteries behind, and they put down a strong barrage on the Boche's front line within a minute. We learnt next day from an intercepted telephone conversation of the enemy that his attack had been intended to be a big show, but had failed entirely owing to the unexpected resistance of the garrison and the accuracy of the artillery, which had utterly demoralised the troops waiting in the front line to follow up the attack. The Battalion was especially complimented on its work by the Divisional Commander and the Corps Commander, Sir Julian Byng. The enemy who made the attack were Bavarians.

Our casualties, unfortunately, were heavy—5 officers and 62 other ranks. Of the officers, only Lieut. Cross was wounded at all severely, but 15 men were killed and 19 missing. A big cross was erected at Maroeuil cemetery in memory of all who fell on this day.

The Effect of the Explosion.

When dawn broke we were able to look about us and ascertain the full extent of the damage done. Where our front line of posts had been there was now nothing but a line of deep craters, full of debris of all sorts, including numbers of unexploded German bombs, which they had abandoned when they retired. Immediate work had to be started upon the consolidation of the craters, and the two supporting companies were sent up for the purpose. A new trench was quickly dug round the edge of the craters and joined up in the gaps between them. During the next night some protection was afforded by the erection of a barbed wire fence in front. Luckily the Boche did not attempt to interfere with the work—he too had evidently had quite enough for the moment—and the rest of our stay in the line passed uneventfully. On May 2nd the 5th Seaforth's relieved us, and we returned to our billets in Maroeuil.

Thus the anniversary of our arrival in France was spent in the line—saddened a good deal by the loss of so many of our brave comrades on April 28th.

The Labyrinth and Vimy Ridge.

AFTER five days' breathing space at Maroeuil, we did four days' duty as Brigade support at Ariane and then moved up to the usual place in the front line, relieving the 5th Seaforths, our numbers being again replenished by the arrival of a draft of 104 other ranks. The six days in the line only produced one casualty, and on the night of May 16th we had the satisfaction of seeing a party of the 5th Seaforths under Lieut. Mackintosh make a raid upon a German salient opposite our trench in retaliation for their attack upon us. Starting from A Company's trench under cover of a heavy barrage, the raiding party forced an entry into the German lines, where they caused several casualties and did much damage, though failing to secure a prisoner. The enemy's retaliation upon our trenches was not very heavy.

On the 17th the 5th Seaforths relieved us and we returned to Maroeuil, where we supplied the customary working parties for the R.E. dump at the railway station. On the 21st the Boche took it into his head to carry out a persistent bombardment of Maroeuil, which lasted from 9.30 p.m. till 3 a.m., one shell falling every half-hour. We escaped without loss, but Brigade Headquarters were hit and seven men of the 8th Royal Scots—the Divisional pioneer battalion—were killed in their billets.

Shortly after this we were given an eight days' rest at the village of Villers Chatel, a pretty and refreshing spot surrounded by woods green with spring foliage. Unfortunately we did not get there without loss, Maroeuil being again shelled before we marched off. One unlucky shell, which narrowly missed the Colonel, wounded both Lieut. Fysh and Lieut. Flett severely in the legs. Their wounds took them both home. The stay at Villers Chatel was very pleasant, and the usual parades took place with a view to smartening us all up again. Concerts were also held, and, for the officers, a not unnecessary riding school was instituted.

To every one's regret our padre, the Rev. Campbell, left us here on promotion to the senior chaplaincy of the 4th Division. He had been with us for over a year in France and had made a friend of all of us, officers and men alike. His services in running the Battalion canteen and arranging concerts, to say nothing of his arduous clerical duties, were much appreciated. He was shortly afterwards succeeded by the Rev. M'Bain from Aberdeen.

Just before we returned to Maroeuil on May 31st, a draft of six officers arrived—Lieuts. Murray, D. E. Dow, D. M. Forsyth, J. N. C. Fraser, and the brothers Low.

Vimy Ridge.

It was now an open secret that the British were making preparations for a big attack on the Somme some time during the summer, and it was now the duty of the 51st Division to take over a much longer portion of the front in order to release troops for the concentration on the Somme. The Divisional front was to be extended northwards so as to include not only the Labyrinth but also the Vimy Ridge. This necessitated all three Brigades being in the line at once, and our Brigade was to take over the new trenches on the Vimy Ridge. It was something of a compliment to the Division that the holding of so long a front in such an important and difficult area should be entrusted to it, more especially as the Boche had been exceedingly active on the Vimy Ridge during the past month. Our relief of the remnants of the 2nd Worcesters and 10th Cheshires in the line was carried out under the worst possible conditions. The Germans had recently heavily attacked the sector and were still engaged in a most intense bombardment. Everything was in confusion, and the losses of the battalions in the line had been very heavy. Consequently they were able to give us very little information concerning the trenches—indeed, it was only with the utmost difficulty that the relief was concluded at all. Eventually, however, after suffering several casualties, all four companies settled in in alphabetical order from right to left.

The trenches lay about half-way up the ridge, and along the front of A and B Companies ran a series of the most enormous mine craters, the Germans holding one lip and we the other. The Germans' side was, however, rather higher and better organised than ours, and from their perches on the top of the craters their snipers fired at short range at any one who showed himself. In C Company's front, too, the line ran back at right angles, for the Boche in their attack had captured part of the original front line, and what was now made into a fire trench had before been a communication trench. D Company on the left had probably the best place, and were in touch with the 2nd Division on our left. The same plan of forward posts with the main fire trench behind were again in evidence, and behind A and B Companies there was a third line, chiefly manned by machine guns. Most of the trenches were of chalk, except on the left in the lower ground, where they were of earth. There were some good dug-outs, but not enough. Battalion Headquarters possessed a safe residence at the end of a sunken road. On our right were the 5th Seaforths. Throughout our tour we were much worried by the sniping, to which, from want of pre-

pared sniping posts, we were unable to make adequate reply. A Company lost an excellent sergeant in this way—Sergeant Walker, who was killed while standing apparently under cover in the main fire trench. The enemy's rifle grenades were also troublesome, and our casualties were, unfortunately, heavy. On the night of June 5th D Company had some excitement with a Boche local attack, which they repulsed with great vigour. The next day we were relieved by the 8th Argylls and sought refuge in dug-outs and cellars in the ruins of Neuville St Vaast. The village, being so close to the line, had practically been pounded to atoms, and was now used as a strong point in support of the front system of trenches. Brigade Headquarters was situated in a row of dug-outs on the outskirts of the village. While we were there, C and D Companies were under the orders of the 8th Argylls in the line, and A Company under the 6th Gordons in the line. This battalion had recently joined the Brigade in place of the 6th Argylls, who had left us. B Company formed the garrison of Neuville in case of attack. Working parties for the line were supplied by all companies day and night.

Honours for Officers.

We here heard the good news that Colonel Grant Smith had been awarded the D.S.O. and Major W. Macdonald had been mentioned in dispatches for their services with the Battalion, while Captain J. A. C. Mackay received the Military Cross. Captain A. D. Macdonald also obtained his majority.

From June 12th to the 18th we held the line again, relieving the 8th Argylls in the same sector as before. The weather now added to our troubles. It had been raining hard for some days, and the trenches were in a shocking condition. One communication trench, named Lassallo, was over the knees in liquid mud. Consequently there were several cases of trench feet, although we were now in the month of June. The enemy exploded one small mine in front of our trenches, but did us no damage. He was also again active with rifle grenades. Our casualties were not, however, heavy this time, except for the loss of Lieut. Murray, who was killed by a shell fragment. We succeeded in making things unpleasant for several of the enemies' snipers whom our own snipers spotted. Lieut. MacGregor and Sergt. Brown did excellent work in this line. On the morning of the 17th we had the satisfaction of seeing our R.E. explode a mine under the enemies' trenches in the 5th Seaforths' front, though the effect of it could not be ascertained.

A great innovation was the adoption of the Daylight Saving Act, which took effect on the night of the 14th.

Telephone Precautions.

A word, perhaps, might be added here with regard to the great precautions which now had

to be taken in the use of the telephone and buzzer. Both we and the Germans had invented very effective listening sets for tapping enemy telephone messages, and a great deal of valuable information had been obtained in this way. The greatest care had therefore to be taken when using the telephone to prevent any chance of the enemy's obtaining information from the conversation, a fact which made the adjutant's work a great deal harder, since in talking to the Company commanders about important matters it was impossible to get beyond hints and periphrases. Even the names of the brigades and the battalions might not be mentioned and code words were substituted. Our Brigade was known as Bird, while the Battalion was Hawk. Further complications were caused by the frequent changes in these code names.

On the 19th the 8th Argylls took over from us and we went into huts at Bray till the 24th, where we enjoyed baths and performed physical exercises and bayonet fighting.

When we returned to the trenches we found them even muddier than before, and the bad conditions and hard work began to tell on the men's health.

On the 25th the Germans attempted a raid on the 5th Seaforths on our right, but with very little success; while on the 26th the 2nd Division on our left carried out a raid on the Germans. The enemy's artillery retaliation extended to our two left companies, which were lucky to escape with few casualties. On the morning of the 29th the enemy bombarded our sector very heavily, but by good luck we had not a single casualty. The morning of our relief by the 8th Argylls some officers of the 2/18th London Regiment, 60th Division, were sent into our trenches for instruction, a good omen which immediately caused rumours of an early relief for our Division. We then moved back to Acq, a large village, which provided quite good billets. Here we found another draft of 60 other ranks waiting for us. Five more officers had also joined us during the month, Lieuts. D. J. Dow, Jenkins, Brown, and Middleton, and finally Major A. G. Graham, M.C., of the 6th Scottish Rifles, which battalion had just been disbanded at the base. A permanent medical officer, too—Captain Peter—was attached to us. Since Captain Mackay left us in the Labyrinth we had had a succession of temporary M.O.'s, but Captain Peter was destined to stay with us till he was killed in 1917.

July 4th found us once again engulfed in the mud of the trenches, where on the next day two of our Companies were relieved by two Companies of the 2/18th London Regiment, who were taking their first tour of duty in the line for two days. The Boche smuged himself by blowing two small mines in No Man's Land without any visible results. The two other Companies of the London

Regiment came and took their turn in the line from July 7th to the 9th. The weather was their worst enemy, the Boches being now much quieter in this sector.

On the 12th we were finally relieved by the 2/20th London Regiment and said good-bye to the sector. Two of our Companies spent the night in Neuville and two moved back to billets in Mont St Eloi, and on the next day the Battalion concentrated at Ecoivres. The following officers had now reported for duty:—Lieuts. Ure and Weir from the 6th Scottish Rifles, and Lieuts. J. Bliss, R. Macgregor, Stewart, M'Donald, Sellar, Grant, and Groves from our reserve battalion. A draft of 18 other ranks—old hands returned from the base—had also arrived.

Rumours of another rest after our arduous trench holding were prevalent, but were quickly dispelled on the 14th, when orders for a sudden move southwards on the next day, with all kits reduced to a minimum, were received. It was then made known that Colonel Grant Smith was leaving us for other duties. His connexion with the Battalion had been a long one, and he had commanded us in France with great ability for over a year. We all wished that he might have been able to see the thing through with us till the end, and said good-bye to him with much regret. Another great loss was that of our greatly respected Brigadier, General Ross, who left us at this moment after an unfortunate difference with the Divisional Commander. His constant presence in the front trenches, his unflinching cheerfulness and contempt for personal danger, and his incessant attention to the welfare of the men he commanded, had earned our unstinted admiration and esteem. To lose two old friends at this moment, when, as it turned out, we were just starting for the Somme, was a very hard blow for the Battalion.



Colonel J. GRANT SMITH, D.S.O.

We were all glad to hear that Major W. Macdonald was to succeed Colonel Grant Smith in the command, instead of a stranger from another battalion. Major A. G. Graham became his second-in-command.

Lieut. A. H. Macgregor, who had been our Intelligence Officer, now took command of C Company in place of Captain Petrie, who had been wounded in the arm during the last tour in the line.

With these changes the Battalion prepared itself to meet new experiences in the battle of the Somme.

The Battle of the Somme.

For the first time on July 15th, 1916, we had an experience of movement by motor lorry, when the whole Brigade embussed at Ecoivres and journeyed to Sus St Leger. The day was hot and the roads were dusty, and by the end of the trip every one looked as if they had been rolling in a flour mill and were literally white with dust. A night was spent at Sus St Leger, and on the next day we marched from there through Doullens, where we saw our new Brigadier, General H. Pelham Burn, D.S.O., to Gezaincourt, where we remained till the 20th. Thence a short march

took us to Candas, where we entrained for Mericourt, the railhead in front of Corbie. From the railhead we marched on to Buire in the small hours of the morning. Thus we were back again close to our old haunts of the last months of 1915. Troops of all arms swarmed in the district and billets were packed, which gave us some idea of the enormous concentration of men necessary for the great battle in progress. On the next night we moved up nearer to the line, passing battalions of numerous divisions either just coming out of or just going into the fight. Marching

through Meaulte and Bécordel, we finally arrived at an open field just on the south side of Fricourt wood and bivouacked there for the night. The whole Brigade was encamped around us. We were now actually in front of the original British front line, and about three miles behind the firing line at High Wood. Below us in the valley ran the chief road up to the line, which wound its way along through Mametz, past Mametz and Caterpillar woods, to Bazentin-le-Grand. With conscious irony this valley was known as Happy Valley, presumably because no place was so persistently bombarded by the enemy's guns. By the side of the road all along the valley there were gun emplacements and horse lines, while in the air hovered rows of the clumsy sausage observation balloons, and aeroplanes hummed incessantly on their way.



Captain J. A. C. MACKAY, M.C.

A Stroke of Ill-Fortune.

Early in the morning we had a stroke of great ill-fortune. The enemy had apparently noticed the concentration of the Brigade and sent over a few shells to register the exact position. The first shell landed among the 6th Gordons and killed one man. The next landed right in among a line of mules, knocking several of them out. The third fell right at the feet of Major A. D. Macdonald, Captain Mackay, and Lieut. Anderson, who were standing talking together. Captain Mackay

died of his injuries, while Major Macdonald lost an eye and Lieut. Anderson an arm and was otherwise severely wounded. To lose two company commanders and our machine-gun officer at this moment was a very great blow for the Battalion. The death of Captain Mackay was deeply regretted by all the men of D Company and all the officers of the Battalion. During his long service in France he had done splendid work with never-failing cheerfulness, and had proved himself one of the most efficient of our officers and one of the best companions.



Major A. D. MACDONALD.

Later in the day the enemy opened an intense bombardment on the Brigade's bivouacs with shrapnel and H.E., but though the shells appeared to fall right among the various battalions, practically no damage was done. However, the authorities rightly judged the place to be too hot for us, and we moved rapidly to another field about half a mile farther back, just behind the old front line at Fricourt.

On the following day another short move took the whole Brigade into open bivouacs a little farther back still, just off the road to Meaulte. Here we practised the attack, in case it should be required of us to go over the top in the near future. Just before we left this place we heard that the 154th Brigade, which was now in the line, had made two



LIEUT. W. G. ANDERSON.

attacks on two consecutive nights against the German position: at High Wood, but that both attacks had been repulsed with severe losses. The first rush of the attack on July 1st and the following days, which had broken temporarily the German line, had now spent itself, and the Boche was now holding with grim determination the Pozieres ridge and the ridge connecting High Wood and Delville Wood. Meanwhile his artillery had recovered itself, and had had time to make new positions, and was growing in volume day by day. The British attack had developed into a series of local attacks to attempt to gain positions of tactical importance.

On July 26th the 154th Brigade was relieved in the front line by the 153rd Brigade, whom we in our turn relieved as supporting Brigade in and around Mametz Wood. Just before we went up five more officers joined us—Lieuts. Junner, MacBey, Donaldson, Smith, and Sauter.

The whole Battalion was placed in Mametz Wood, where there were one or two shallow trenches and a few very insecure dug-outs. All around us were gun emplacements, from which the guns kept up an almost incessant fire. Along the road flowed an endless stream of transport of all kinds—gun limbers carrying up shells, water waggons for battalions in the line, motor and horse ambulances, cyclist orderlies, officers on horseback. Numerous dead horses by the roadside gave proof of

the effect of the enemy's shells. During our first evening in this position the enemy bombarded us with gas shells, which caused several casualties in the Battalion largely owing to our inexperience. From the next morning onwards the whole Battalion was employed in working parties, some carrying up ammunition and stores to the line, others digging to construct a new support trench. These parties always came in for a good deal of shelling, and several casualties were incurred, including Lieuts. Sellar and Groves. Lieut. J. M. Macgregor was wounded inside the wood, a whizzbang actually grazing his arm in its flight. On Saturday, the 29th, and Sunday, the 30th, the enemy bombarded the wood very heavily with shells of all calibres, and both B and C Companies lost their sergeant-majors, Officer and Mason, two warrant officers who had done excellent service with the Battalion throughout.

A Gallant Action.

Corpl. J. Mackenzie during one of these bombardments performed a very gallant action which won him the D.C.M. A dump of trench mortar bombs was set on fire by a shell, which also knocked out several men of the 5th Seaforths. Corpl. Mackenzie immediately went to the spot, succeeded in putting out the fire and rescuing the wounded men, all the time under a heavy bombardment and with the possibility of the whole dump blowing up any moment.

The 153rd Brigade made an attack on the night of July 30th, which unfortunately was no more successful than before, and owing to the casualties incurred, our battalion was moved up to support them in case of need. On arrival at the Windmill, we settled down in what cover we could find in shallow trenches alongside the road or in shell holes. We were lucky during our march up the road to this position to be left free of any shelling, but on the next morning the enemy kept up a persistent bombardment all over the area where we were. We were not sorry the next night to leave this place and carry out the relief of the 153rd Brigade in the line. The 6th Gordons and 5th Seaforths went into the front line, while we occupied support trenches on the next ridge just by the ruins of Bazentin-le-Grand. From this position we supplied the customary nightly working parties. Their job was to dig a new trench out in No Man's Land about 200 yards in advance of the existing front line. This trench was known as Seaforth trench. When in the support trenches we had to put up with fairly persistent shelling, especially as there were 18-pounder batteries close behind us which the enemy was anxious to knock out.

On August 4th we changed places with the 5th Seaforths in the front line. Our left rested on the S.E. corner of High Wood and

our line extended 600 yards towards Delville Wood. We had the 8th Argylls on our left and the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers on our right. Two communication trenches ran up to the front line, High Alley on the left and Thistle Alley on the right. Both were well known to the enemy, and received constant attention from their shells. As we made our way up to the line, we passed the corpses of the horses of the Indian Cavalry lying in a plateau behind High Wood, where they had made their famous charge against the Boche machine gunners. By this time they were distinctly "high."

It had now been decided that it was hopeless to oust the Germans from their position by High Wood until a jumping-off place had been constructed closer to the German line and proper reconnaissance of the Germans' exact position had been made. This was very difficult to do, as they had placed their trench very cunningly on the reverse side of the ridge and there was no place in our lines from which we could see it. Neither had our aeroplanes, though very active, been able to locate it. Consequently our Brigade was spared the costly and fruitless attacks made by the other Brigades, but made up for it by extremely hard digging. No sooner was Seaforth trench constructed than we were ordered to push out saps in advance of it again, the heads of which were later to be joined up to form yet another forward trench. The work was not rendered more pleasant by the presence of the unburied dead who had fallen in the recent attacks. Snatches of sleep were few and far between for every one: there was always some work to be done and there were constant alarms of enemy attacks, which necessitated the immediate manning of the line. Nevertheless, the weary men dug with praiseworthy determination, and by the time we were relieved on August 7th, had made real progress.

One satisfactory feature of the fighting was the supremacy of our aeroplanes. Only on one day did we see Boche aeroplanes, and

then it was a strong squadron of six, keeping close together, and not venturing farther afield than the front line.

Two more officers were wounded before we left—Lieuts. D. M. Forsyth and Fraser, which brought our casualties for the whole period to the following totals:—Officers—killed 1, wounded 8; other ranks—killed 22, wounded 89.

A word should be added in praise of the men of the Transport, who daily made the unpleasant journey up Happy Valley to bring us our rations, and never once failed to deliver them, however heavy the enemy's bombardment.

In the early hours of August 7th the 2nd Worcesters relieved us, and we plodded wearily back along Happy Valley, past Fricourt and Méaulte, to an encampment near Dernancourt. Here we spent two days of much-needed repose, and enjoyed the luxury of taking our clothes off for the first time in a fortnight. An al fresco entertainment by the Balmorals was much appreciated.

A railway journey from Mericourt on August 9th took us to the village of Longpré-Corps-Les-Saints, where we remained for three days, carrying out the usual programme of training, after which another train journey by night took us northwards and deposited us at Thiennes on the morning of August 12th. From Thiennes we marched to a pleasant village called Blaringhem, where we remained for nearly a week, well away from the sound of the guns. The training was varied by an inspection by the Brigadier. Our afternoons were free, and several cricket matches were played and enjoyed, though the pitch was no billiard-table.

On the 18th we again sought the railway at Ebblinghem. Here, as we were entraining, we received an informal visit from General Plumer, into whose army we had now come. Detraining at Sténwerck in the afternoon, we marched with our pipers at our head into the famous town of Armentières, where the whole Battalion was billeted in a big factory.

Armentieres.

THE troops that we relieved in the Armentières area were the Australians and New Zealanders. The town itself, although so close up to the line, had never yet been very badly shelled. The worst sufferers had been the churches and the squares in their vicinity. Several shops still did a good trade, including one of Burberry's, where one could buy almost anything. There were also two or three good cafés, where afternoon tea could be taken, or an excellent dinner with first-class champagne obtained.

We spent eight days in the town, using a field just outside as a parade ground for training purposes. We also supplied working parties for the 154th Brigade in the line, among other things carrying up gas cylinders to be placed in the front line. Reinforcements arrived to the number of one officer (Lieut. Cumming) and 46 other ranks.

On August 26th we relieved the 4th Gordons in the front trenches, almost due east of Armentières, with our Headquarters in the ruins of a house in the Chapelle d'Armentières,

a suburb of the town. On our left were the 8th Argylls and on our right the Tyneside Scottish of the 34th Division. The trenches here were all breastworks, for the most part in a good state of repair, except in one or two parts which the Boche was particularly fond of strafing. There were no deep dug-outs as on the Somme, but there were one or two fairly secure ones built of concrete. The communication trenches were very good, and were duckboarded all the way up. It was even rumoured that a quartermaster had been known to ride up one of them on a bicycle each night!

No Rest for the Boche.

The situation was normally quiet, but with the customary aggressiveness of our Brigade, we soon began to stir it up. The General was determined that if German troops were sent to this area as a rest from the Somme, their rest should be made as lively as possible. Constant trench-mortar shoots on our part goaded the enemy to retaliate with a heavy *Minenwerther*, which wrought unholy chaos in the breastworks when it landed in the right place. Frequent night patrols, sent out to discover gaps in the enemy's wire, kept him alert during the hours of darkness.

On the night of August 30th/31st an organised strafe was arranged to worry the Boche and make him think we were about to attack. In the evening our artillery carried out a concentrated shoot on his trenches, which drew rapid retaliation from his mortars and field guns, and at 1.30 a.m., on the signal of a rocket, a combined shoot was opened by all our mortars, rifle grenades, and machine guns in the line. At the same time gas was discharged on our left, while we threw smoke bombs over the parapet which wafted a thick cloud of smoke over the Boche trenches, and doubtless was mistaken for more gas. The enemy's retaliation was weak. The moral effect of the whole proceeding on the enemy opposite to us must have been considerable.

It was now definitely decided that our Battalion should make a raid on the German trenches in this sector, and during the rest of our tour we settled on the exact place and sent out numerous patrols to get a detailed knowledge of the lie of the land.

The next few days were passed without any remarkable incidents, but with the usual mortar strafes from both sides. The whole tour in the line cost us a dozen casualties.

On September 5th the 6th Gordons took our place in the line, and we moved back to the reserve line of trenches about 1000 yards in rear, just near the Chapelle d'Armentières. Here we stayed till September 19th. Our C.O., Lieut.-Colonel Macdonald, unluckily contracted trench fever at this time, and was invalided home, and we thus lost yet another of the valuable old hands. Major Graham was appointed Lieut.-Colonel in his place.

Conditions in the trenches were not improved by two days' heavy rain, but otherwise our reserve trenches were not too bad and the daily working parties neither too strenuous nor too dangerous.

Preparing a Raid.

Meanwhile the raiding party, consisting of nearly 40 picked N.C.O.'s and men under Lieuts. A. H. Macdonald, Jenkins, and Sainter, had been sent back to billets at Armentières in order to practice the raid and to get into good condition. By the use of accurate aeroplane photographs, an exact duplicate of the bit of German trenches to be raided—the Railway Salient—was constructed in a large field outside Armentières. Thus every man was instructed in his own particular job in the raid and rehearsed it till he could make no mistake. Besides this, some of the party came up to the trenches nightly and went out on patrol, to get used to the features of No Man's Land and to have a look at the German barbed wire. Before long every single man in the raiding party had made one of these reconnaissances.

The date fixed for the raid was September 16th. At dusk the party assembled at Headquarters and were issued out with the necessary bombs, etc. Faces and knees were blackened and anything else that might show up in the darkness. The party was then divided into two, one group under Lieut. Jenkins and one under Lieut. Sainter, and made their way up the communication trench to their jumping-off positions in the front line.

Bangalore Torpedoes.

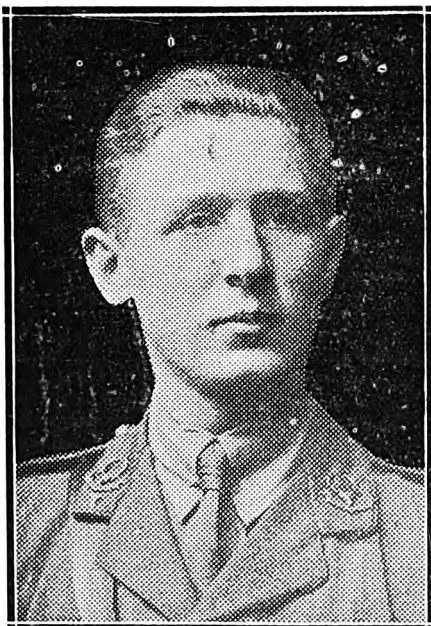
In order to effect an entry into the German trench the German wire had, of course, to be cut. Sometimes this was done by artillery; but on this occasion that method was not adopted as being too obvious, and Bangalore torpedoes were used instead. These torpedoes were great long tubes full of explosive, and had to be as long as the width of wire required to be cut. In this case the German wire was 25 yards thick, and consequently the torpedoes were of the enormous length of 75 feet. Each torpedo took five or six men to carry out.

At about 8 o'clock the two torpedo parties started out carrying their torpedoes, and going right across No Man's Land—a distance of about 200 yards—managed to push both torpedoes successfully under the German wire without being spotted by the German sentries. The night was dark, but it was a remarkable feat that so little noise was made that no suspicion was aroused. The torpedo was thus ready on either side of the salient to cut a gap through which the two parties might enter.

Into the German Trench.

The two officers then led out their parties and lay down in No Man's Land about 30 yards behind the torpedoes—just clear of any

danger from the explosion. Punctually at zero hour the torpedoes were exploded by electric cable from our front-line trench, and at the same moment our artillery put down a heavy barrage on the German front and support lines all round the salient, leaving it entirely isolated. The torpedoes had cut gaps clean through the German wire and the two parties rushed through into the German trench. The Germans were taken completely by surprise, and were either bombed in their dug-outs or bayoneted as they attempted to emerge. Lieut. Sainter and his party met with no serious opposition, and, after six minutes in the German trench, during which time they did a great deal of damage, withdrew at the prearranged signal by a gap previously made in the wire at the centre of the salient by our trench mortars.



Lieut. D. FRASER JENKINS, M.C.

Lieut. Jenkins and his party met an organised German bombing party, which they eventually knocked out, not, however, without serious loss to themselves, and, after bombing four dug-outs, they returned by the way they had come. They succeeded in bringing with them a prisoner, whom they had to carry bodily out of the trench. Many prisoners would have been secured had not the raiders been provided with lassos. The idea of these

was merely to put them round the prisoners' necks and so force them to follow their captors out of the trenches, but unfortunately the Germans thought that they were to be hanged by them to the nearest tree, and refused to stir, lying down on the floor of the trench. Consequently they had to be dispatched, as time was precious.



Lieut. J. D. SAINTER, M.C.

Gallant Rescue of Wounded Men.

Both parties succeeded in returning without molestation, for so good was our barrage that no German machine guns were able to open fire at all. Lieut. Jenkins, however, on getting back, found three of his men missing. He accordingly made three journeys back to the German wire accompanied by No. 2236 Pte. A. Macdonald, each time bringing in one of these wounded men. The German machine guns had now got going, and made his work the more hazardous. Only one man was reported as missing, and that was Sergt. Harry Anderson. He was last seen moving along the top of the German parapet to try and take the German bombing party in the rear.

Thus the raid was a complete success—a prisoner was taken and his unit identified, great damage was done to the German trench and its condition thoroughly reconnoitred, many Germans were killed, and the moral of the survivors much upset. Lieut. A. H. Macdonald deserved great credit for his successful organisation of the whole enterprise.

while all who took part showed great gallantry. Both Lieut. Jenkins and Lieut. Sauter were subsequently awarded the Military Cross, while Corpl. F. Hamilton obtained the D.C.M., and Lance-Corpl. A. R. Woods, Ptes. A. Macdonald, P. C. Goldsmith, Lance-Corpl. J. Matheson, and Pte. A. Innes got the Military Medal.



I./Cpl. J. MATHESON,
M.M.



Pte. A. MACDONALD,
M.M.

The total casualties for our whole 24 days in the trenches, including the raid, were 9 other ranks killed, 27 other ranks wounded, and 1 missing.

Bailleul.

On September 19th the 6th Black Watch relieved us in the trenches, and we moved right back through Armentières to a camp just outside Bailleul. This camp was very low-lying, and a good deal of rain made it very damp. The training carried out here was chiefly devoted to practice of the attack, sometimes by companies and sometimes by the whole battalion. Five officers—Lieuts. M'Vicar, R. T. Smith, M'Lean, M'Ewan, and Haslegrave—and 132 other ranks joined the Battalion during our stay in the camp.

On the 28th of September the Army Commander, at a parade of the whole Brigade, decorated the above-mentioned officers and other ranks of the raiding party, and expressed his satisfaction at the success of the raid.

The camp had one advantage—namely, its proximity to Bailleul, where there were several good shops and a café, where dinner was obtainable.

On the last day of our stay, Battalion sports were organised by Captain Macgregor, and proved a great success.

The following day, September 30th, we entrained at Bailleul Station in the evening, detraining at Doullens about midnight, whence we marched to Gezaincourt, the village we had previously visited on our way to the Somme.

During the whole of the month of October we led a most nomadic existence. On the 2nd we left Gezaincourt, and in sheets of rain marched to a camp in the Bois de Warnimont, near Authie, where we were joined by four more officers—Lieut. Polley, Lieut. M'Caskie, Lieut. Morrison, and Lieut. Edwards (formerly a sergeant in D Company). After one day's stay in this very muddy camp we moved to huts in Couin, forsaking them again on the day following for bivouacs at Colincamps. Our marches were now much hampered by the issue of Lewis gun carts. Each Company now was provided with one of these new light machine guns, and in the line they were excellent, but the carts designed to carry them and their ammunition were of the most inconvenient possible pattern. Tyres and wheels constantly came off, and the bath-chair handle for controlling them was worse than useless. Moreover, the roads were in such an awful condition that the wheels became simply clogged with mud, and the wretched Lewis gunners were utterly exhausted after a few miles' pushing. Usually they had to be left behind on the road owing to breakdowns.

On October 6th we moved hurriedly from Colincamps and relieved the 5th Seaforths in the trenches at Hebuterne, having the 8th Argylls on our right. Nothing eventful occurred, and as we only spent 24 hours in the line, we hardly had time to look about us at all. There were insistent rumours that we were to attack hereabout shortly, but absolute chaos seemed to reign as to where and when. Careful reconnaissance of the line was cut short by the fact that we were relieved the next day, to our great surprise, by the 9th Welsh Regiment, and retired to bivouacs again outside Colincamps. The following day we accomplished yet another move and sought billets in Louvencourt, which village we found absolutely packed with troops. Thus in nine days we had slept in eight different places!

From Louvencourt most of the officers carried out a reconnaissance of the trenches about a mile south of Hebuterne, for it had now been announced that we were to attack there as part of a big movement to take the villages of Serre and Beaumont Hamel.

Consequently we spent three days at Louvencourt energetically practising the attack—the whole Brigade under the supervision of the Brigadier over a taped-out course, which resembled the actual trenches that we were to capture as closely as possible. The date of the push was not yet announced, but was to be very soon. Accordingly, when we moved up to an encampment near Courcelles on October 12th, we imagined the show to be imminent. While there we worked hard at practice attacks, bomb throwing, Lewis gunning, and revolver shooting. On the fourth day of our stay there whispers reached us

that the show was off after all, and this was shortly afterwards confirmed by the Brigadier, and we were ordered to march to billets in the village of Bus. A night's rest at Bus and we again moved, this time to Mailly-Maillet. The sudden change in the plans of the Division appeared to have created a good deal of confusion, for when we arrived at Mailly-Maillet we found most of the Brigade trying to get into tents in the wood, where there was really only room for a battalion. However, we eventually settled in somehow, and remained there two days.

On the 19th we marched through Mailly-Maillet and relieved the 8th Argylls in the trenches directly opposite Beaumont Hamel. Several houses in the village appeared to possess walls and roofs still fairly intact, but our artillery was already battering away at them. The enemy's artillery replied vigorously to our own, and we were lucky to avoid casualties in our two days' tour. Every one was busy getting to know the way about our own trenches and having a careful look at the

enemy's, for we were now told that Beaumont Hamel was to be our objective in the attack which was still to come.

The 5th Seaforths relieved us on October 21st, and we marched about five miles to the village of Forceville, where we occupied quite a good camp composed of huts, only to move again on the next day to Lealvillers, a little farther back still. As the attack had now been fixed for October 24th, we only spent a night at Lealvillers, and moved up on the afternoon of October 23rd to a halting ground just behind Mailly-Maillet. Here we were to make the final arrangements for the fight and wait for dark to move up to the line. Directly we got there it started to pour with rain, as it had been doing pretty persistently for the last fortnight. We had no shelter except a certain number of tarpaulins, under which we had to huddle and keep as dry as we could. After about two hours of this, the Brigadier informed us that the attack was postponed for 48 hours, and we trekked promptly back to Lealvillers.

The Battle of Beaumont Hamel.

As it turned out, the postponement of the attack was considerably longer than two days. The weather remained atrocious. Visibility continued to be so bad that neither aeroplanes nor artillery could finish their work, while the ground was churned up into such a quagmire as to be almost impracticable for the infantry. So zero hour kept being put off for another 48 hours and yet another 48 hours.

Meanwhile we stayed on at Lealvillers, cleaning up the roads, and, when the weather allowed us, rehearsing our attack. On October 30th we moved back to the huts in Forceville. Lieut. Stuart here joined us from the 2nd Seaforths.

Here we remained until November 12th, watching the weather with anxious eyes. As time went on, and there seemed no signs of things drying up, we gradually came to the belief that the show would definitely be off for the year, when two or three days' better weather brought us orders on the 10th that zero day would be November 13th. Every day the artillery had been pounding away at the German wire and trenches, and the village of Beaumont Hamel, and the roar of the guns was incessant. As we stayed in our camp and practised the attack, or worked on the improvement of the camp or played football matches, we felt glad not to be on the German side of the line at Beaumont Hamel.

On November 8th Major I. A. Forsyth, of the 4th Seaforths, came to us as second-in-command. Captain A. H. Macgregor had

temporarily been holding this position, but now returned to C Company as Company Commander again.

Our final preparations for the attack were completed on November 12th. After a quiet day and a battalion parade for divine service, a good square meal was provided at about 6 p.m., and at 9.30 p.m. the Battalion left the camp and, fully equipped for battle, started towards the trenches. A halt was called in the fields about a mile from the trenches and tea was provided from the cookers, after which the companies proceeded separately to their assembly positions, an officer, who was not taking part in the operations, acting as guide in each case. The communication trenches were naturally somewhat congested with so many troops going up to the attack, and progress was slow, but eventually all company commanders reported their men in position shortly after midnight. The enemy's artillery was, luckily, quiet during the assembly, and he seemed to suspect nothing.

A Struggle Grim and Great.

With the completion of the assembly, a deep and ominous quiet brooded over the silent trenches, a quiet that was shattered with a roar at the first glimmering of dawn, when every gun on the British side opened, and the troops poured forth from their assembly trenches to the attack. It would be impossible here to attempt a detailed account of this great battle: suffice it to say that the

whole operation was an unqualified success. Despite the dogged resistance of the German defence, the Highland Division pushed its way into the village of Beaumont Hamel, bombed and bayoneted the enemy out of the innumerable caves and cellars with which the place was honeycombed, and finally, after the most stubborn fighting, which lasted till late in the afternoon, succeeded in establishing themselves in their objective—a position up on the ridge beyond the eastern outskirts of the village. This was no mean feat for 'Harper's Duds' (as the Division had ironically christened itself after their expensive and disheartening operations at High Wood on the Somme), when we take two facts into consideration. In the first place, the previous attempt to take this position in July, at the outset of the Somme battle, had failed completely with very heavy losses. Indeed, the Germans themselves, as was afterwards discovered from captured documents, had regarded the place as impregnable, and its capture was a great blow to them. In the second place, the appalling weather prior to the battle, in conjunction with the continuous heavy bombardment, had churned the whole place up into a veritable morass, and any one who has tried walking—to say nothing of fighting—through the sticky clay of France in full fighting kit will appreciate how much more difficult the task of the attackers was made by the state of the ground. So bad were the conditions that the two tanks, which for the first time were co-operating with the Division in an attack, became irretrievably engulfed in the mud before they even reached the German lines, and had to be abandoned.

Another feature of the enemy's position was the number of deep caves and shelters in which they were able to wait during the bombardment in complete security. What had happened on the previous occasion had been that the Germans had allowed the attacking troops to come rushing through on the heels of the artillery barrage and had then emerged from these hidden shelters and shot them down from the rear. Special precautions were accordingly taken to prevent any repetition of this, and A Company had been allotted the task of dealing with the dug-outs and generally clearing up in the village.

It was while engaged in this work that Lieut. Edwards performed the actions for which he subsequently received the D.S.O. Arriving at the entrance of a large dug-out, in which were massed between one and two hundred Germans, fully armed, he immediately called upon them to surrender, though his own party consisted of about half-a-dozen men in all. After some hesitation, the Germans, who probably had no idea of how few men Lieut. Edwards really had with him, agreed to surrender, but unfortunately the tables were turned a few minutes later by the

arrival of a German bombing party from outside, who put most of Edwards' command out of action and took the rest of them prisoners. Edwards was then disarmed and marched off to another large dug-out, in which he found the whole headquarters staff, including the Colonel, of the German battalion.



Lieut. EDWARDS, D.S.O.

Apparently quite unconscious of the fact that the British troops were now steadily pushing their way through the village, the Colonel started to cross-question Edwards by means of an interpreter. He had not got very far, however, before loud sounds of rifle shots and bombs were heard all round outside, and Edwards promptly explained to the Colonel that he was now probably surrounded by British troops, and suggested that he had much better surrender quietly to him before anything worse befell. After consultation with his other officers, the German Colonel came to the conclusion that this was probably sound advice, and agreed to surrender with the stipulation that all their lives would be spared. Thus Edwards once more turned the tables and had the satisfaction of getting back not merely his own revolver, but also the revolvers of all the German officers as well. He then formed his captives up in line and marched the whole bevy of them, about half-a-dozen in

all, back to Colonel Graham at Battalion Headquarters, not neglecting on his way to hand over the other cave full of Germans to a company of the Royal Naval Division, which was co-operating on the night of the 51st Division.

Artillery Fire.

THE work of the artillery, both before and during the fight, was all that could be desired, and it was undoubtedly largely due to the accuracy of the barrage that the attack was the success that it was. On the village itself the effect of the artillery had been perhaps too thorough. Hardly one stone was left standing on another. One unfortunate officer had been given the village post office as a guide to him in finding his objective. On reaching the place where he thought the post office ought to be, he found nothing but a heap of ruins, which might once have been anything, and so was left to find his way as best he might!

It was inevitable in such an action that the casualties should be very heavy. The figures of the Battalion's losses are themselves a sufficient indication of the grim nature of the struggle and the gallantry with which both sides fought. B, C, and D Companies all lost their commanding officers—Captains Sim, M'Gregor, and Anderson. The death of Captain M'Gregor in particular was a great loss to the Battalion. By his courage, his enthusiasm, and never-failing cheerfulness he had endeared himself to the hearts of all those who knew him, both officers and men.

The enemy, there is no doubt, suffered still more heavily. Besides his casualties in killed and wounded, the number of prisoners taken on that day was considerable. Throughout the day they kept pouring back in batches to the prisoners' cage in rear of the trenches. Most of them appeared to have had quite enough of the war, and were only too glad to be taken prisoner. Their only anxiety evidently was that they might still be shot, and in the hope of propitiating their captors they offered to them watches and any other valuables that they happened to possess.

The work of the day was by no means over with the capture of the German position. The trenches that had been won had to be held, and all hands had to turn their attention to the consolidation of the new line before the inevitable German counter-attacks were launched. The men in the front line were a confused jumble of the remnants of B, C, and D Companies, all mixed up with a similar jumble of the 5th Seaforths. Very few officers were left to take command. Nevertheless order was soon evolved out of the chaos, and when the counter-attacks came, as they did in the evening and during the night that followed, our men were ready for them, and successfully beat them off.

For two days more we remained in the line, the enemy, except for one or two local attacks on small sections of the trenches, contenting himself with continuous and systematic shelling of the whole trench area.

Heavy Casualties.

Eventually, on November 15th the Battalion was withdrawn into reserve positions in the original British lines, but their labours were not yet ended, as two large carrying parties had to be detailed to carry up bombs, etc., to the troops in Beaumont Hamel. In the evening the weary and mud-bespattered men received the welcome order to return to the camp at Mailly-Maillet, where all soon settled down to sleep. The next day the Battalion paraded for a roll-call, when it was found that our casualties numbered 14 officers and 263 other ranks. The Colonel expressed his warm appreciation of the heroic achievements of all ranks. The rest of the day was spent in an attempt to clean some of the mud from clothing and equipment, and on the following day much-needed baths were obtained in Mailly-Maillet. No time was lost in making up the Battalion's strength, and 82 other ranks arrived from an entrenching battalion on November 18th. We were not, however, destined to leave the area yet, and on November 19th we were sent back to the old British front line opposite Beaumont Hamel as reserve troops. Colonel Graham having proceeded on leave, the command of the Battalion devolved upon Major Forsyth. Our five days in the trenches were spent in salvage work—collecting bombs, tools, equipment, etc., and generally cleaning up the debris of the battlefield—and in the grimmer task of collecting the bodies of those of the Battalion who had fallen. They were all buried in the military cemetery at Mailly-Maillet. The enemy's artillery devoted practically all their time to Beaumont Hamel and the front lines, and were kind enough to leave us practically undisturbed.

The 22nd Manchester Regiment, of the 7th Division, relieved us on November 24th, and we returned to our camp in Forceville, where three officers—Lieuts. Flett, A. T. Smith, and T. Bliss—joined us. We moved again on the 27th to our old friend the village of Bouzincourt. We only spent a few days there, marching up to huts in the deserted waste near the ruins of Ovillers on December 4th. Another draft of 70 other ranks joined us, also Major Doig, who took over command of A Company. A further draft of 112 other ranks arrived on December 8th. Large working parties were supplied for work on the big dumps of material in the vicinity. The enemy shelled us intermittently, and three men were wounded.

The Abomination of Desolation.

On the 9th of December we sought the front line to relieve the 4th Seaforths, and the spot we now found ourselves in might aptly be described as the Abomination of Desolation. The trenches we now occupied were in front of the ruins of Courcellette and close to the equally desolate Pozières. Here some of the bitterest of the Somme fighting had taken place, and the country was consequently a desert waste, pitted with shell holes, now full of water, and intersected with hastily improvised trenches, while in the villages just mentioned there was literally not one stone left upon another. Only a few cellars remained, which acted as dug-outs. We had the 8th Argylls on our left and the 7/8th K.O.S.B. on our right. Communication trenches were practically non-existent, and one had to wade through seas of mud in the darkness to get up to the line. Even when one reached the line, it was hardly recognisable as such. There was one more or less connected trench running through our sector, but in front of this were isolated posts, which were manned by small garrisons. These garrisons had to remain in them for 24 hours, as no movement was possible in daylight. In the darkness it was no easy matter to find these posts, especially as there were several trenches running off from the main trench, some of which led to the posts and some straight into the German lines. Several Germans and some of our own troops lost their way in this manner and strayed into the enemy's lines, where they were taken prisoner. To add to the discomfort of the sector, there were no dug-outs or shelters, and it rained nearly every day. Movement in the trenches was consequently very tiring, and even above ground it was nearly as bad, while several unfortunates fell into shell holes in the dark and lay there too exhausted to struggle out. It was little wonder, in these conditions, that our four days in the trenches cost us 120 men sick either with trench feet or trench fever and exhaustion. Major Doig also was sent to hospital. Another misfortune was the loss of Lieut. Blair and Sergt. Matheson, who were cut off by the Germans in one of the isolated posts and taken prisoner. The enemy's artillery was very active throughout, particularly on the back areas, the aid post in Pozières receiving especial attention. We were not sorry to hand over our trenches on the 13th to the 6th Gordons and move back to the Wolf huts near Pozières. These huts were only corrugated iron shelters and were by no means palatial, but were one degree better than the trenches. Several officers joined us here—Lieuts. Kennedy, A. M'Leod, Neale-Smith, Lindsay, J. Brown, Crozier, A. Macdonald, and Read.

After two days of supplying work parties, we were delighted to receive orders to pro-

ceed to Bouzincourt, where, as usual, we found much more comfortable quarters.

An Unlucky Shell.

A week's rest here did us all a great deal of good, and our numbers were strengthened by the arrival of 158 reinforcements. From the 22nd to the 27th of December we occupied Ovillers huts again, where we had several unpleasant experiences. On the 23rd we had to supply a large working party of 5 officers and 250 other ranks for the front area. As they marched up to their work along a much-shelled road near Pozières, an unlucky shell burst among the party, killing Lieut. T. Bliss and the R.E. officer with him and knocking out 20 of the men. A similar party was supplied on the next night, but met with better fortune.

On the morning of the 24th the Germans sent over one shell which landed right in the camp, selecting as its only victim the Colonel, who was wounded in the leg. Lieut.-Colonel Graham's departure was a serious loss to the Battalion, in command of which he had shown great ability and force of character. On the following day the Adjutant was also forced to pay a visit to hospital through sickness.

Christmas Day.

Christmas Day in the crowded huts was naturally not a very festive occasion, but everything that could be done in the way of a Christmas dinner was done, and the day was observed as a holiday.

After another day's rest we entered the line again, two companies going into the front trenches and two staying in reserve in the Wolf huts. After two days, the companies exchanged places. The trenches were still very bad, but a few shelters had been erected, and the length of the spell shortened, so there was much less sickness on this occasion.

On December 31st A and B Companies were relieved by the 6th Gordons and moved to huts at the Chalk Mound near Courcellette, C and D Companies remaining in the Wolf huts. Our total casualties for December numbered 1 officer and 3 O.R. killed, and 5 officers and 32 O.R. wounded. On New Year's Day the companies remained in these positions, improving them as much as possible and carrying out some useful salvage work.

On the next day the 7th Gordons relieved A and B Companies, who moved to the Bruce huts at Aveluy, while on the 3rd the whole Battalion concentrated once more at Bouzincourt, where six days' rest was granted us. In Sir Douglas Haig's New Year dispatches Captain A. H. Macgregor, Captain R. T. Peel, and R.S.M. Greig were mentioned for their services with the Battalion. A further draft of 81 other ranks joined us and was inspected by Major I. A. Forsyth, who had now taken over command of the Battalion.

Leaving Bouzincourt on the 9th, Headquarters and A and B Companies proceeded to the Oviliers huts again and C and D Companies to billets in Aveluy, where nothing more eventful occurred than the supplying of a working party of 4 officers and 200 other ranks for the R.E. to dig a trench in which to bury a cable.

For two days Captain A. H. Macdonald, C Company's new commander, had the privilege of commanding the Battalion while Major Forsyth was away at a school. A further stream of officers flooded in, namely, Captain Legge, Lieuts. Webster, King, Rogers, and James Low.

On January 12th, 1917, the Battalion started a long trek westwards to reach the back area for a rest. The night of the 12th was spent at Bouzincourt, the next night at Raincheval, the next at Heuzecourt, the next at Gapennes, and the night of the 16th at our destination, Nouvion-en-Ponthieu. This long march was a big strain on every one, exhausted as all were by the hard life in muddy trenches and crowded huts. However, all did their best, despite sore feet, and the Battalion acquitted itself creditably.

The rest at Nouvion was in no way so pleasant as the one at Pierregot the year before. Billets were poor and the weather bitterly cold. Snow and frost made parades an unpleasant drudgery. The stay at Nouvion lasted until February 5th. The usual programme of training was carried on, company commanders at last getting the chance to inspect their men thoroughly and find out the abilities of the men from the latest drafts, while specialists—bombers, Lewis gunners, snipers, etc.—practised their own particular métier with assiduity. In the way of recreation a great deal of football was played, and the Battalion team proved victorious against all other units of the Brigade. Reinforcements kept arriving—Lieuts. Macmillan, Mackenzie Douglas, Wellwood, and Gillespie, and 110 other ranks, while on February 4th Major C. E. Johnston, who had commanded the 3/6th Battalion since its creation, joined us as second-in-command. Captain N. D. Campbell, of the 8th Argylls, was also attached to fill the Adjutant's place during his absence.

From the 5th, when the rest ended, to the 10th we were continually on the march, our halting-places for the nights being Gapennes, Vacquerie, Bangormont, Marquay, Guestreville, and finally our old friend Maroeuil, near Arras. The marches were mostly short, the longest being 13 miles, and caused little trouble.

The night of the 11th saw us back in the trenches in the Roelincourt sector, where we relieved the 12th Royal Scots, a little way south of the Labyrinth. B and D Companies were in the front line, A Company and Battalion Headquarters in cellars at Roelincourt,

while O Company was left in reserve at Anzin. The companies changed over after four days. The Division soon asserted itself in the line, the 9th Royal Scots carrying out a successful daylight raid on a mine crater.

Shortly before we were relieved, another big draft of 73 joined us, which brought us very nearly up to strength again.

The 6th Gordons took our place on the 17th and we moved back to billets in Maroeuil, where we remained till the 23rd. During these days practically the whole Battalion was engaged in digging communication trenches around Roelincourt. We then changed places again with the 6th Gordons, with A and C Companies in the line, D Company in support, and B Company in reserve, an inter-company relief taking place after three days. The tour of duty was not eventful, though six casualties were caused by the enemy's shell fire, and ended on March 3rd, when the 8th Argylls relieved us. We moved back to "X" hutsments at Ecoivres, where we had the honour of an inspection by Sir Douglas Haig. Here Lieuts. D. M. Forsyth and C. E. Stewart reported for duty.

The next move was on the 8th, when we marched somewhat farther back to Fréviliers, where battalion training was carried out, particularly the attack, for we had learnt that we were again to take part in a big British offensive to be opened in a few weeks' time round Arras, our own position to be the Roelincourt trenches we had held.

The Adjutant returned to the Battalion at Fréviliers, and Captain Campbell was promoted to the position of second-in-command of the 5th Seaforths.

Leaving Fréviliers on the 15th, we spent three days at Agnières and Caucourt, and then were billeted at Acq. Here Lieut.-Colonel Forsyth left us for other duties, and Lieut.-Colonel S. Macdonald, D.S.O., from the 5th Gordons, came to command us.

Battalion attack practice took place daily, and we were given a training area near Caucourt, where the usual taped facsimile of the German trenches was being constructed. Unfortunately this area was a long distance from Bray, whither we moved on March 22nd, and the march to and from the training was a tedious one. At Bray we were situated in a wood on the ridge, and were all under canvas. It was instructive to notice how these camps were springing up all over the countryside, like mushrooms in the night, in preparation for the offensive. Very little concealment was possible, and the concentration must have been as visible to the enemy's observers as to ourselves. However, he was good enough not to worry us with shells. Reinforcements to the number of about 30 continued to arrive, and we were all pleased to welcome back Captain C. E. Fysh, who joined us on March 31st, now recovered from his wound.

On April 1st B and D Companies attended a Brigade parade, at which General Ferguson, commanding the 17th Corps, presented medals to N.C.O.'s and men of the Brigade who had recently distinguished themselves.

Another move took place on the following day, and we took up our abode in the "X" hutments at Ecoivres. Here we carried out further training for the attack, particularly practising wire-cutting and shooting at dummy figures in trenches, under the keen eye of the Brigadier. This work continued for four days, and on the 7th company commanders held final inspections of their men in full fighting kit. All blankets and superfluous kit was then dumped with the Quartermaster. When darkness fell, A and C Companies and Headquarters marched up to the trenches east of Roilincourt, and relieved the 7th Gordons. A Company were unfortunate enough to lose Lieut. Lindsay, who was wounded during the relief. B Company settled down in cellars at Arzin, while D Company remained where they were. During the whole of the next day, the enemy, as though suspicious of our designs, kept up a heavy and accurate artillery fire on our trenches, causing several casualties, and in one case knocking out a complete Lewis gun team—a piece of very bad luck in view of the coming attack. During the night of the 8th the final concentration of the Battalion in its assembly trenches was completed with the advent of B and D Companies. Fortunately the enemy shelling had now died down, and our final arrangements were made in peace. Everything was reported by 2 a.m. to be in readiness for zero hour.

The battle that was fought out on this 9th of April was perhaps one of the most successful of all those in which the Battalion was engaged. From zero hour in the grey dusk of morning till the end of the day everything worked out according to plan, and before darkness fell the enemy had been driven back on a wide front to a distance in some places of five miles. Joining hands with the 51st in the attack were the other two Scottish Divisions, the 9th and the 15th; while on the left could be seen the Canadians gallantly sweeping across the Vimy Ridge.

The hurricane barrage that fell upon the enemy front line effectually kept the defenders under cover, and the first wave of the attack was able to rush into the trench as soon as the barrage lifted without much opposition and successfully dealt with the enemy in their dug-outs. The further lines of trenches, however, gave much more trouble, and it was only after severe fighting that the Battalion's objectives were taken. As was to be expected, the casualties were heavy and totalled well over 300. Four officers were among the fallen—Captain G. Stewart, and Lieutenants Middleton, Webster, and Law.

Among other awards afterwards made for this day's fighting were Military Crosses to Captain Alastair Macdonald and Lieut. D. J. Dow, both of whom led their companies with great courage and ability.

The weather, as usual, was unpleasant, and a heavy snowstorm which swept over the battlefield in the evening rendered the task of holding the captured trenches anything but comfortable.

But short breathing-space was vouchsafed to us after this struggle, and a fortnight later saw the Division once more in action near Fampoux, behind which village the enemy had taken up their position after their defeat on 9th April. The attempt to drive him still farther back was to all intents and purposes a failure. True, a little ground was made, but the loss of life was appalling. The Battalion was allotted to the 153rd Brigade as reserve for the attack, and about lunch time was called upon to proceed up to the new front line over the open. The greatest confusion reigned, and it was only with great difficulty that the Battalion managed to take up a position by nightfall and start the work of consolidation. Attempts to reconnoitre with a view to consolidating a position round the well-known "Chemical Works" (or, as they were usually termed, "The Comical Works") unfortunately led to the capture by the enemy of three of our officers, namely, Captain Petrie and Captain Legge and Lieut. Forsyth, all of whom ran into enemy pickets on the railway embankment and had no chance of escape.

Another unfortunate loss was the death of Lieut. Macvicar, who was shot in a gallant attempt to silence an enemy sniper.

It was with feelings of unmixed thankfulness that, after two days' hard digging and constant alarms of enemy counter-attacks, we received orders for our relief and marched back to Arras.

Little of moment occurred for a space until, in the middle of May, we found ourselves holding the line slightly to the right of our former position near the Chemical Works. We had only been in the line for 24 hours when the enemy started an intense bombardment of our area. This lasted with unabated vigour all afternoon and evening, and caused serious casualties, and was followed up at night by gas shells. When dawn broke the following morning, a hurricane bombardment started, under cover of which the enemy crept through the front line of the Brigade at two weak spots, by the railway embankment and the canal, and started to try and join hands in the middle. At this point, however, his troubles began. He was hotly engaged by the men of C and D Companies in the support trench and his advance checked. Then Captains Fysh and Bliss inaugurated a counter-charge over the open and drove the now demoralised enemy from their hiding-places in shell holes. In

their retreat, they ran right back into the front line of the Brigade—which they had never captured, having, as explained above, merely slipped through at two points unobserved in the darkness. The occupants of this front line promptly rose up and smote the enemy as they fled, and completed their discomfiture. A very small percentage indeed of the attacking force ever returned to their lines.



LIEUT. D. EDWARD DOW.

On the other side of the railway embankment, where A and B Companies were situated, events did not turn out quite so well. At first A Company succeeded in holding up the enemy attack, but later, owing to the troops on their left having retired and thus left their flank exposed, they were forced to give up the front line and retire to the support trench slightly in rear. From this trench the Company, most gallantly commanded by Lieut. D. E. Dow, refused to move despite incessant attacks by the enemy. When their stock of bombs was exhausted and the enemy again attacked, the gallant remnant of the Company leapt from their trenches, met the attack with the bayonet, and routed it. Luckily for them this was the enemy's final effort, for every officer of the Company had now been either killed or wounded. Lieut. Dow himself lay in the trench shot through the lung, and though he was brought back later, he succumbed in hospital to his wounds.

By the evening the line was securely held at all points, and the sorely depleted Battalion soon afterwards was relieved. After a day or two at Arras, we were carried out of this area for good on motor buses, and started upon a well-earned period of rest, which, to our great delight, lasted right on to the beginning of July.

Further awards of decorations, among which were Military Crosses for Captain James Bliss and Lieut. Laurie King, bore witness to the good work done by the Battalion under trying conditions on the 15th May.

R. T. PEEL,



CAPTAIN A. H. MACDONALD, M.C.

PART II.

The Third Battle of Ypres.

OUR welcome to the village of Nieurlet by its few inhabitants had been lukewarm, and this was one of the reasons—the first and perhaps the least—why our send-off was so very warm and flattering. At all events, when on the 3rd of July, 1917, the Battalion went piping down the high road to St Omer, the good kind folks impressed us with the length, depth, and breadth of their sorrow, as only Frenchmen can. We also did our poor best to air our sentiments, and having abandoned a stack of "bully" and shed innumerable necessary buttons as souvenirs, we marched off feeling better.

The entraining station was at St Omer, and an express from the saintly city took little more than two hours to cross the frontier, there to foist us on the hospitality of West Flanders. On detraining at Poperinghe, well-stocked shops, crowded restaurants, an open picture-house, and flourishing hop-fields in the environs deceived us sorely into the belief that here there could be no battling nor any thought of it. That night we encamped on a map reference—the notorious A 30 Central—in a wood a good hour from the town. The

first order which the duty sergeants brought was that Poperinghe was "out of bounds." Later, and when darkness fell, we stood at the doors of our huts and listened to the endless relays of Goitias excelling each other over the town. We ceased to begrudge the occupants of the wretched place their somewhat mixed blessing.

"Poperinghy."

Poperinghe, by the way, was, of consent, re-christened by the usual method of adding the inevitable "y." The tendency ever was to increase the syllables and the difficulties of French words. The Englishman's clever contraction "Pop" was too clever to be borrowed, and the town became "Poperinghy."

On the night of the 4th July we moved into trenches, and found in them, or near them, our assembly positions for the rumoured coming offensive. They lay, these trenches, some three miles north of Ypres city and across the Ypres-Yeer Canal, and their unpopularity was undisputed. The area had been drenched with gas-shells, and the poison hung about in slight dips and shell-holes until

disturbed into a dangerous activity by a breeze or the traffic of men. One person was in his element—the Divisional Chemist or Gas Officer—who found an inestimable variety of brands, old and new, through the nasal organs of the Battalion. Troops were warned that an odour of cooking apples was an infallible indication of the presence of gas. The youth, with a single whiff—enough to take him “over the water”—would gladly aver that the smell, according to his present recollection, was not unpleasant and that it might quite well be like sour apples.

Death of Captain Peter.

The sojourn of three long days and as many longer nights was not devoid of tragedy. The German artilleryman was on tenterhooks, and more or less throughout the whole period of the tour was feverishly active. Six good fellows amongst the men fell, and our doctor early received a fatal wound. Captain Peter, who wore the ribbon of the Military Cross for his services at Beaumont Hamel, had done much more than minister unto our physical ailments. He was heart and soul in the business of beating the enemy, and his energy and personal valour early won admiration. Few there were who did not at some time or other seek his counsel and rejoice to hear his approving and inimitable “Good!” His death was as the manner of his life had been, uncomplaining, unflinching.

The huts at the map reference again claimed us, but not for long; the training area at St Omer was too good to lie vacant, and the Division was not built for holding the line and that alone. On the morning of departure from A 30 Central, the men were forming up on the main road running alongside the camp, when a solitary shell screamed through the trees into the camp. It burst inside the medical hut, and two unfortunates, who had paraded sick, were evacuated wounded. The effect of the noise on the men in the roadway was curious and inexplicable—for all, or nearly all, were hardened in battle. It is enough that all paled visibly—just for the moment. The ranks were dressed mighty quickly and moved off to a healthier zone.

The chief feature of the village of Wulverdinghe, where we next found our homes, was its abundance of estaminets, good and deplorably bad. The billets, on the other hand, were excellent farm-steadings and barns in abundance. Most of us will remember “Wulverdinghy” for one distinct blessing—the return of everybody’s good friend, Captain Mair. Here, too, such good fellows as Lieutenants Jack McIntosh and W. J. Fraser joined from home and were posted to companies.

Angry Peasants.

Our actual training-ground lay miles from our billets, in proximity to St Momelin, and for the next fortnight the Brigade enlivened

this quiet little place, disturbing, in brutal fashion, the even tenor of its ways. The area for practice skirted, in part, St Momelin, and every acre was under cultivation. Small wonder, then, that, during our first trials, and as we breasted our way through the standing crops, a well-nigh apoplectic host of men and women of all ages pursued our officers, yelling as they ran, in the vilest dialect, what could not have been more unpleasant than it sounded. Our interpreter was soon forward, and having scolded the unhappy crowd to silence, explained matters, apparently to their complete satisfaction, for on the following day we were on a smiling footing. The destruction was—need one say?—unavoidable. A training-ground somewhat similar to the actual battle area meant success assured, and at St Momelin the very contours of the chosen sector had a marvellous resemblance to our morsel of the Ypres salient. The course, when ready for practice, pegged out with coloured flags, its trenches of tape, and the ugly green canvas erections to represent farms and pill-boxes, recalled to most minds some particular Northern Meeting.

A Strenuous General.

Our attacks were severe physical tests, mournfully serious, and were usually directed in person by that whirlwind Brigadier—General Pelham Burn. This gentleman made the life of a company commander a very crowded one, and with his arrival even the brow of our platoon-officer was wont to pucker. “P. B.” was a great General, in that he knew the limitations of his men, knew what was (to quote himself) “on” and “not on.” Never did he spare himself or any one else, and the appearance of his very dog, “Punch,” had an electric effect on our commanders. We have seen the business of a commanding officers’ conference delayed considerably while each Colonel vied with his neighbour to caress “Punch.”

A Strange Barrage.

The imitation attacks were always preceded by a human barrage, composed of the pipe band complete with pipes, drums, and bugles, oddments of the transport, and signalers equipped with flags. This motley party produced the creeping barrage, and the efforts of pipers and drummers who frantically emulated the scream and burst respectively of shells (which all had heard) were worthy of the cause. We often wondered, but did not dare to ask, what our musical genius, Pipe-Major Milton, thought of it all. To quote our Colonel, the whole Battalion “wrought hard.” We worked in conjunction with the other units of the Brigade—at that time the 5th Seaforths, the 6th Gordons, and the 8th Argylls—and sometimes an aeroplane did liaison work overhead.

Each man soon came to know the river Steenbeek and his own route to it as thoroughly as if the Lossie or the Findhorn were to be

his objective. Still, there was a great deal more to be learned, for, from the synchronisation of watches before, until the final exploiting of success after a battle, there can be rest for no keen soldier. Scouting, stalking, "intensive" digging, field-firing, the wearisome study of home-made maps, and endless lectures, were but a few of the unavoidable trials. Replicas of the battlefield were constructed in miniature; actual pictures of places of interest on the coming journey were produced and promised, one remembers, a greater abundance of farms than exist in the Laich of Moray. The Steenbeck was shown to flow across the front in a north-westerly direction and in the region of our final objective. Our gunners were, as usual, optimists. They had pieces, not only for every German gun, but also for every possible obstacle, for every clump of grass that might afford the enemy a moment's cover.

Our Three Kinds of Concerts.

The evenings at Wulverdinghe could be dull at times, perhaps only to the town boy; yet he had his amusement. St Omer was easily accessible if you had armed yourself with a pass, and in most billets there were a few odd books and almost invariably a Leipzig edition of Baedeker's "Northern France"! And then there were concerts, of three distinct species—Padre's concerts, company concerts, and smoking concerts. The programme of the first type (such anathema to the holy man) was long and attractive; the second started with a few half promises; while the third variety never would boast a programme.

The Padre's concert was held in the medical hut, and you will remember the reverend gentleman's pained surprise (it was his initial effort) when his troupe failed him, and how, with noble resolution he shyly sidled to the piano and intoned the legend of the three flighty crows.

Loyalty to one's Company made the Company concert popular. Much talent, vocal and instrumental (a man could always cheerfully find room for a melodeon where his emergency ration had been), was here first revealed that had been hitherto precluded from expression by a merciful and compassionate Providence.

The smoking concert—there was one at least while we were at Wulverdinghe—was an orgy peculiar to sergeant-majors, quartermaster-sergeants, and sergeants, with a leavening of senior officers, for a time. He'd in the sergeants' mess, it had a beginning but no very definite end. All our concerts were "smoking," but the labelling of this genus was curious. Conspicuous on its platform was a goodly supply of beer, and in accordance with the logic attributed to sergeants, it was a "smoking" concert. In the matter of singing or speech-making the sergeants of the Sixth were "die-

hards." Hence the success of that concert from their insular point of view of course. Yet who of us would not have been a sergeant of the Sixth for that night—or any night?

Preparing for Battle.

The programme for the coming operations, which Higher Command was pleased to call the "Third Battle of Ypres," changed from time to time almost in its entirety, like that of a picture-house—only more frequently and with less apparent reason. As "Z" day—which was the first day of the battle—approached, platoon commanders were decidedly addle-headed, and non-commissioned officers and men reduced to a state of sheer mental exhaustion by the endless flow of order and counter-order which had to be absorbed. The master-stroke seemed to come when "Z" day itself was changed from the 25th to the 28th of July. It was changed again, however—more's the pity!—from the latter date to the 31st.

It must be borne in mind that this operation was the fourth great battle of the year on the British line. The frontage affected extended over fifteen miles, and the Fifth Army, under General Gough, were to advance to deliver the main thrust on a front of some eight miles from the Zillebeke-Zandvoorde road to Boesinghe. Gough had no fewer than four Army Corps for the exploit, with a varying number of divisions in each. The 51st Division adorned the XVIIIth Corps under Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse. Our Battalion was still ably commanded by Colonel S. M'Donald, while our company commanders were Captains Boyd and James Bliss and Lieutenants M'Caskie and Hudson. The last-mentioned had only just rejoined from instructional duties.

Suddenly on the 23rd of July we moved forward to the line by motor bus, and encamped near St Janster Biezen—School Camp—about midnight. Here again we had a few days of dull lectures, practice assemblies, and the like tiring exercises, and it was very early (4.30 a.m.) on the morning of the 29th before we started for our old friend "A 30 Central," now called "Dirty Bucket Camp." This was on the Sabbath, and in the corrugated shelters, whosoever wished had communion dispensed to them, and all attended divine service. On the Monday the camp rang with preparations, but there was no gloom about. In the quiet corners there may have been a little more Bible than usual.

As all big things are better done on a good meal, Major Johnston and Captain Mair, in collaboration with our excellent chef, Sergt. Munro, furnished a right royal feast.

By 7.30 in the evening the first section of the leading company trekked forward to the assembly positions, followed by the successive sections of the Battalion, with the length of

a cricket-pitch between each, to minimise the risk of detection from the air. Just east of Brielen—which is about five miles from Ypres and to the north-west of that city—the Ypres-Yser Canal was crossed, after we had collected from the limbers the last of the paraphernalia—Lewis guns, ammunition, and a mixed assortment of bombs. The unwieldy load which men carried into battle is beyond description and was the subject of many a good joke afterwards, and, rest assured, only afterwards. Yet, a though you might marvel at a soldier's carrying powers, you would never cease to be astonished at what he has the audacity (and the good sense) to throw away.

In good time every man was in his appointed place, and (thanks again to the quartermaster and a scratch carrying party) had been served with a cup of good hot cocoa. There were men who thoroughly enjoyed this meal; others, again, suffered from the "examination-room feeling," and a playful Providence gave each sickish man neighbours of the first category. For everybody time lagged wearily, and men itched for active movement rather than inaction, that they might be up and tackling the evil. Never, in any battle before or since, have troops been so packed in trenches. Dug-out and shelter, boyau (communication trench) and sap, bed and firestep—all were crowded with their quiet, fearful thousands. There had been firing on the right and on the left, and a few casualties with husky rumours of many. A steady, pitiless drizzle began to fall, and the night was black with haze.

The Guns Open—The Attack.

In such chaos the bombardment was let loose, and at 10 minutes to 4 on the morning of the 31st July, 1917, guns of every calibre in their tens of thousands told forth to our enemies that here was something unquestionably big and formidable. The earth trembled, and the very clamour was exhilarating, having in it something that inspired and encouraged. Out scrambled the first wave of D Company, and their direction, in spite of the utter darkness, was infallible. Soon the shell-bursts shed momentary light. Behind, and down towards the old canal, artillery lights had appeared, and the whole rear area was en fête: everywhere flashed the busy guns. Forward there was little to be seen so far, except, here and there, a dull red glow, where the boiling oil drums had come to earth and spread their frightfulness. Our light guns, bursting yards above and behind their heads, sprayed the track of the leading line with a shower of lead. The difficulties were appalling. Everywhere were deep water-filled craters, unseen and treacherous; cruel strands of half-broken barbed wire—loosely coiled—and masses of leaped entanglements lay in their path, and all this in a veritable wilderness of mud. Such obstacles some never overcame, and many

good and brave fellows, including one gallant officer, 2nd Lieut. C. N. Lipp, died fighting before it was yet light.

Capture of Fysh Farm.

No orders were given, nor could any have been heard, and so those harassing weeks of what had come to be known as St Momelin monotony began to bear fruit. One platoon, amongst the first to leave the line, had been sent out to capture "Fysh" farm (named after one of our officers). Heavy machine-gun fire caught and halted them, and, knowing its source was at their goal, the officer made his plans. The orders were signalled successfully—it was still pitch-dark, and the noise was deafening. His command was split up into three parties: one remained to pour a continuous and rapid fire against the front of the building, while the other two crept up the flanks. The British artillery was still firing on this region, but no shell fell on the farm; the gunners knew nothing of the strength of such places. Immediately the line of the barrage lifted and crept forward, the flanking parties ran together and presented themselves at the rear of the stronghold. Its occupants were outwitted and most of them surrendered willingly. Such as did not were accounted for. They proved to be Saxons, and were eager to establish this at once, as if it were to make some difference to their future comfort. Their machine-guns and other arms were duly taken possession of, and a lucky fellow was dispatched to the rear in order that they might be safely caged. On examination, "Fysh" farm was a building of ferro-concrete with walls yards thick, and a depth and strength of head cover which nothing smaller than a 12-inch shell, and that a direct hit, would have disturbed.

Similar tactics were adopted in the capture of Britannia farm—another pill-box—but here the Germans, twenty-five in number, elected to come to meet the advancing troops, so they scampered forward and "kameraded" in approved national fashion. Two further machine-guns were annexed.

Pulverising the Black Line.

Before the sky was seen to be paling in the west, the enemy artillery began to shoot wildly, and the darkness was relieved somewhat by his flare lights. These were of beautiful colours and rode slowly over the battlefield in parachutes. B Company had already made headway, and the men could see, as they sheltered behind it, the barrage pulverising the Black Line. This was that Company's first objective and really the premier main line of German resistance. The depressing rain still continued, and mist hung heavily in the morning air. The artilleryman did his work well, and this position of first importance soon passed into our hands, not,

however, to a line of flashing bayonets, but to dribbles of tired men, who dropped into its almost unrecognisable line at odd intervals here and there, and resolutely made use of their rifles. The honour of capturing a 4.2 howitzer was theirs, and they had to dispute their right of ownership with an encroaching unit of the Black Watch far more bitterly than with the common enemy.

A Friendly Tank.

The Sixth now discovered that enemy resistance was stiffening and casualties were being caused by unlocated snipers. The prisoners, too, that had just been taken were of a different type: they were of the 3rd Reserve Guards Division, whereas in the outposts all had been Saxons. On marched D Company for the support trench to the Black Line, hesitating but a moment in that trench, then out and forward to their objective. A terrific machine-gun fire, coming from the far right, greeted them, and the line was thinned. With the utmost hardihood, the Sixth pressed forward in the open, and at this critical moment a tank bore in sight. Nothing much, up to this point, had been seen of the tanks, most of them having belied in the mud. This one was heaven-sent, and signals were immediately exchanged. On its sides was painted the name "Gordon" in white letters.



LIEUT. HAROLD B. LENDRUM.

Liko an elephant at play, the machine moved forward, clumsy and uncouth, doing inestimable damage to the enemy's morale and performing wonders with our own. Gathered in their pill-boxes, the terrorised Germans must have unanimously voted for discretion, for it was but minutes until the battle was once more liquid. D Company ran to their objective, and clusters of weeping Germans

gladly gave up their arms and offered all they possessed to be spared. In this, amongst the many who fell, must be mentioned that brave boy, 2nd Lieut. Harold Lendrum.

Farm Forts.

Away on the right the 6th Gordons had kept pace with our advance and thereby secured the right flank. It was, unfortunately, otherwise on the left, where a battalion of the Black Watch were in difficulties and could not keep abreast of the general advance. The Green Line was the next objective, and lay many hundreds of yards ahead. The Pilken Spur had been captured, but there were many outlying (so-called) farms yet to be reduced. For this task D Company was responsible. They were nothing less than small forts, these farms, and of them all, Ferdinand offered the most stubborn resistance. Not only down the slope from the building itself, but away from across the valley of the Steenbeek, came a withering fire. Men were forced to take to what cover existed, in shell-holes, in the slightest depressions, and speedily came into action with Lewis guns and rifles, sweeping all vantage points. With great vigour the attack was pressed home, and Ferdinand was ultimately captured. Many a magazine was emptied into the gray, helmeted figures scurrying over the river, and but few reached its farther bank.



CAPTAIN JAMES BLISS, M.C.

Captain James Bliss.

C Company, whose destination was the last and final objective, had left their assembly positions three hours after the attack had started, and their first and leading waves were unfortunately involved in much of the fighting east of the Black Line. C Company was led with consummate skill by a man who was a great soldier—Captain James Bliss. Bliss, wearing the black band of mourning on his sleeve, and on his breast the Military Cross twice won, handled his men in brilliant fashion. They seemed to know this, as they proudly picked their way through the consolidating troops, maintaining perfect military formation, as if on parade. They extended, and shortly after their leader fell mortally wounded. With noble determination, the Company, having seen what had happened, moved on, impassive but resolute, and with a new passion burning within them to avenge the death of this every man's hero. The daring and skill of Bliss had been proverbial.

All honour to C Company for what they did! Their objective was to be captured by sheer grit and a loyalty to duty stronger even than love of life. Such men and officers as were now left dug, with what few tools they had, a line a hundred yards or more short of the river, and the hideously riven stumps along its banks will be forgotten by none who scraped desperately for shelter in their vicinity. One man was a hero in himself. His courage was outstanding, even amongst this band of brave men, and he was fresh from one daring escapade which had ended in the successful silencing of an enemy pill-box. Along the line he moved, only a gunshot from the nearest Germans, cheerily exhorting his men by Christian name and nickname. Sergeant Edwards was bent on one thing: he was determined that his Company should cross the Steenbeek and reach their objective. There was now only one officer left with C Company.

Sergeant Edwards, V.C.

A single enemy sniper was creating havoc in the line. Many had fallen, and still the single deaths came. It is surely history how Edwards stalked this brute across the open and along his very line of fire; how that he was severely wounded in the arm, but still "carried on," and finally rid the earth and his beloved Company of this danger. Again, the line sagged a little on the right, and the news ran along the troops that a Major of a Cavalry unit—a squadron of which had been attached to us for the operation—had been left out in the open badly wounded. Without a moment's hesitation, Edwards crept out, and through a hail of bullets darted from shell-hole to shell-hole, until he reached the wounded officer. Lifting him up, he carried him back to our line, while the fire increased in

intensity. Edwards had a charmed life on that day. But the one idea which obsessed Edwards—and it must ever have been uppermost in his mind—was how to advance the line, and his personal reconnaissances towards that end were an example of practised skill and endurance. Before the end of the day the Lossie youth was again wounded. He maintained throughout a complete disregard for his own personal safety, and his determination alone engendered a fine fighting, die-hard spirit in his fatigued comrades. He brought great honour to his regiment, and was awarded the highest military decoration—the Victoria Cross.



SERGEANT EDWARDS, V.C.

In the early morning of the 1st of August, Edwards arrived at Battalion Headquarters, and asked, apologetically, if he might have his wounds dressed. It was then raining in torrents, and his only complaint was of the "awfu' weather." His optimism was, of course, infectious. The doctor decreed that he should go forthwith to hospital. Edwards said nothing. His left arm was stiff with bandages, and as he walked out of the shelter he turned to the right and up to his men again.

A Counter-Attack.

The day was far spent, and the weather more wretched than ever. The men could just see from their scrapes, if they dared look, the two narrow bridges down at the river—rough wooden constructions they were, with a handrail on either side. Suddenly, on the left of the front arose a new danger. Much movement was visible on the enemy side of the river, and there were unmistakeable signs of a coming counter-attack. Our left was still unsatisfactorily secured, and communication with Headquarters was cut as soon as it was established. Rocket signals for the artillery were soaked and useless, and so it was borne in upon this sorely tried contingent of Moray youths that they were "up against it" and must depend upon their muddy rifles and Lewis guns. In little groups the Germans, clad in full fighting kit, hurried, crouching, to their assembly positions, when out spoke rifles, Lewis guns, and reinforcing machine-guns of the Highland line. And with what constancy and accuracy were these handled! The new menace had no chance whatever to develop, and of the gathering storm troops only pitiable remnants regained the summit that rose from the valley of the river.

A heavy enemy barrage had preceded this attempted onslaught, and unhappily there were more casualties. Yet, and in spite of all, now was the time chosen by Edwards, and such as he, to advance. Immediate advantage was taken of the rout and the resulting confusion in the enemy ranks. The bridge-heads were rushed and the Sixth crossed the Steenbeek. The victory was now complete. Still there was more to be done. Another pill-box confronted them—Mon du Rasta—and from its loopholes the defending garrison poured a heavy fire. But nothing could withstand the fierce onslaught, and, with a desperate courage, the fort was rushed and seized; only two prisoners were taken. Still they pressed forward until a hedge was reached, which proclaimed their final objective.

Meantime, our gallant parties made the crossing, and the work of another weary consolidation commenced. Then an amazing event happened. Judge of the chagrin of these men when, from Headquarters, a plucky orderly arrived, the bearer of an order to the one officer now remaining, to withdraw all troops to the eastern bank of the river. There were mutterings, and some gave expetive expression to their feelings before this delicate operation was effected. Both Mon du Rasta and Mon Bulgare—yet another concrete discovery—which were tremendously strong points—had to be reluctantly abandoned.

Zealous Stretcher-Bearers.

Morning, afternoon, and evening the stretcher-bearers had laboured unceasingly,

and they continued in their noble work all through the night. Many an officer and man, sorely wounded, owes his life to the plucky endurance and devotion to duty of the six robust, stocky youths who "carried" for their companies.

Thus the battle of the 31st of July, 1917, ended; and on through that vile night went the work of consolidation. Consolidation (Who can forget what this very comprehensive word meant?) was an endless task. Our communications had not been too successful, and Colonel McDonald, as usual, had come up to see things for himself. The signallers were tireless in their efforts to keep the wires through, but no sooner were they laid than shelling destroyed them. Notwithstanding this, the laying had to be continued, for runners were scarce, so dangerous was their route, and pigeons are useless by night.

The Price of Victory.

The merciless rain beat down and the ground was transformed into a maze of bogs and brooks. Darkness came long before all the wounded had been evacuated; there was a scarcity of stretchers, so severe had been the losses. The patience of the wounded who bore this cruel inevitable exposure was beyond all praise, and the little self-sacrifices of the comrades whom they were leaving in the ditches—a waterproof sheet here, an overcoat there—will, let us hope, be recorded elsewhere. Few of the men had any sort of overhead cover, and the misery of that night—31st July—1st August—is inexpressible. Personal discomfort was not uppermost in the mind when, in the pitiless rain, the sentries took post. For the day's success, the Battalion had paid a dreadful toll. Of the sixteen officers who had gone into action that morning, two were dead and one was dying; more than forty men had made the great sacrifice; while seven officers had been wounded and over one hundred and eighty men.

One cannot even hazard a guess at the enemy losses. That there had been dreadful carnage amongst them there was ample proof on the battlefield. Two of their officers and 276 men had been made prisoner, and one howitzer gun, nine machine guns, and huge stacks of stores and equipment had been captured.

Before the dawn of the 1st August our gunners had cast up on the Pilkem Spur, and we were once more on the defensive. The whole operations must cease to allow the ground to recover.

The "Dandy Ninth" (the 9th Royal Scots) replaced the Sixth Seaforths in their ditches. The first Royal Scot arrived just after darkness fell, with the air of chief mourner, but it was very nearly dawn before the last platoon of the Seaforths trudged back across the canal.

Colonel M'Donald's Plight.

Before the Colonel and his staff can set out for home from his Headquarters in the line, he must, of course, report to the Brigadier that the Battalion has been relieved and that another has taken over the duties and responsibilities of holding the line. On this occasion one report was awaiting from a company commander, and the new day had broken before Colonel M'Donald started west. He might have been seen in a sorry plight an hour or more later. In order that he might cross the canal by the usual means—the bridge—the Colonel was forced to deviate considerably towards the north. The bridge was found and used, but the rain had fallen to such an extent that he was now confronted with a bridgeless barrier of water. There was no circumventing it, so the gallant Colonel (followed, not very closely nor willingly, by the Battalion's new medical adviser, Captain Pillans, a temporary Adjutant, the mess cook, and two heavily burdened signallers) waded in and forward and was soon breast-high in the loch. The scene was instantly reminiscent of Bedford and the great genius of that locality, calling to mind one of the many tribulations which befell Bunyan's most famous creation in the eventful journey from the City of Destruction. The Colonel had little thought for such things, however: he would have taken thought many times could he have added one cubit to his stature. The picture of this steel-helmeted Christian, straining every endeavour to prevent the immersion of, first, his armpits; second, his gloves; and, lastly, his riding-crop, is well worth portrayal.

This party was a strangely silent one, with one notable exception in a mess cook who took up the rear with a morose signaller. M— bore, amongst many other things, and slung over his shoulder, the mess "plate"—in a sandbag; and the enamel clanked and M— talked all the way back. This is no place to repeat any of his stories: he will be surprised, perhaps, should he learn that any one besides his glum "buzzer" friend was listening. The latter showed no appreciation except, maybe, by his forbearing silence, but this is in any case easily explained, for M— never failed to preface any of his yarns with the remark that "it" happened long before his companion "came up." M— was, by the way, the chef whom the mess president could never convince that rennet was not the natural prescripition for a recalcitrant jelly of an appropriately named firm.

Back to A 30 Central.

The Battalion War Diary records, under date 2nd August, 1917, that "on the arrival of the Battalion back to A 30 Central, the men received an issue of rum and hot soup and then rested. During the course of the day there was a roll-call. Otherwise the time was spent in complete rest. On the 3rd of August the

day was devoted to cleaning of kit and equipment. Deficiencies were checked and casualties were replaced in bombing squads and Lewis-gun teams. Every convenience was given to the men of drying their clothes, which were still wet. The weather being inclement, that was rather a difficult matter, but by the end of the day all traces of the battle had been removed."

The diarist does not tell of the queues which lined up, fresh from their tot of rum, at the ablution benches and performed the painful operation of removing from clattered limbs the hardened clay; nor of the hurriedly scrawled letters, all of which left their writers "in the pink"; nor of the pilgrimage of some to the bivouacs of our neighbours, the Fifth Sea-forts, for news of relations and friends.

Sir Douglas Haig's Praise.

At the end of the week the whole Brigade moved along to Seige Camp, where facilities existed for training. The Division was always battling or getting ready for battle. Sir Douglas Haig, in patting the backs of his troops of the Fifth Army, did not spoil his message by referring to "greater efforts to come," and one felt as a result that there was no "catch" in his congratulatory message.

"My warmest congratulations," he wrote, "to yourself and to the commanders, staffs, and troops under your command on the great success gained yesterday. The severity of the fighting and the very heavy losses suffered by the enemy will force him to spend his remaining reserves rapidly in the effort to stay our advance, and this is even more important than the gain of ground, great as that was. You and all ranks under your command may well be proud of, and fully satisfied with, such a splendid day's work."

Bayonet or Bullet.

The new week was well begun with church services, but even the Sabbath had to be desecrated by every kind of specialist devoting one solid hour of the holy day to bettering his skill with his own peculiar instrument of destruction. A day or two later and the buglers were sounding the reveille at 3.30 a.m., and by the forenoon we were back once again at School Camp, St Janster Biezen. Here we resigned ourselves to new methods of warfare and to the mercy of relentless instructors. Heretofore "blood on the bayonet" had been our religion. Now up rose some wise disciple and, revealing himself, declared that "blood on the bullet" was obviously a safer creed. The Division was soon converted to his teaching, and we ceased to grimace at stationary sandbags, electing rather to depend on the rifle for speed and accuracy, and to resort to the bayonet in the last emergency and mostly for domestic purposes. Both bomb and bayonet had had their day.

ERE long the coming offensive was heralded by the plainest of indications—an overdose of lecture, now on the territory that lay beyond the Steenbeek and up to Poelcappelle. The weather continued to be unpropitious.

Considerable reinforcements kept on marching into our camp, and many a happy reunion did one witness on the arrival of a home draft. Amongst the officers who joined must be mentioned Second Lieutenants J. H. Munro, A. A. and H. F. Gunn, D. Grant, A. A. Mackenzie, W. Paterson, Geo. M. MacBey, C. T. Cameron, and W. Stewart. The majority was from the "true and tender North."



LIEUT. GEORGE M. MACBEY, M.C.

About our Airmen.

Our airmen were not, unfortunately, masters of the air during this and the succeeding month, and one found difficulty in explaining, far less believing, the astonishing figures of aerial victories which brightened for home folk an otherwise dull communiqué. The continental edition of the "Daily Mail" was wont to publish the Headquarters' report, and French newsboys hawked its single sheet through our camp and did excellent trade at cinq sous a copy. The outlook of the private was certainly limited, but it had ever been so, even

at times when the German aviator dared only to be visible well behind his own lines, and it continued limited at a later period when air victories, we could testify, were not of the paper variety. It came to this, so far as the battle in the air went. The advance of the 31st of July had gained a few miles of territory. In the air "no man's land" had remained stationary. One hastens to add that the trouble was in the inferiority of our machines. Instances were never lacking of the great daring of individuals, too often, alas! with tragic results, and who will ever forget that imperturbable growler of the air, the R.E. 2—christened by the rank and file the "Harry Tate"? Storm or calm, the R.E. 8 never failed us, and ever so often one wanted to tell them so.

The Borstal of the Battalion.

Up till late August life in St Janster contained few thrills, save the not infrequent excitement of an air raid, which mattered dreadfully at the time, but was not unduly depressing and seldom destructive to any considerable extent, at least in our ranks. Perhaps the greatest risk that some men would own to was that of being included in the Regimental Sergeant-Major's awkward squad—truly the Borstal of the Battalion. Its conventicles were always in the early afternoon when everybody else in camp had the day off, and the time of the parade, we were positive, had been fixed so as to coincide exactly with the arrival of that "post-prandial-first-pipe-of-the-day-and-forty-winks" feeling. You had to behave in the morning, else the afternoon brought an exceeding bitterness.

Presentations and a March Past.

Wednesday, the 21st August, 1917, was a red-letter day, when General Maxse, our Corps Commander, presented medal ribbons to those who had been awarded them for gallantry on the 31st of July. The great Sir Douglas Haig (who had evidently taken his forty winks and arrived an hour late) inspected the Brigade, and took the salute as the battalions marched past, led by General Pelham Burn. The writer had the privilege of seeing the march past, and never was there a finer body of men. Of such a column Goethe (who, I suppose, was the Northcliffe of the Napoleonic War) had written almost a hundred years ago, as he admired them in the streets of Brussels, "They all carried their heads so freely and gallantly and stepped so lightly along with their strong bare legs that it seemed as if there were no original sin and no ancestral failing, so far as they were concerned." We have reason to think that Goethe's grandchildren thought otherwise of the 152nd Brigade. The Chief was pleased to congratulate all ranks on the turn-out, and we went en fête the rest of the afternoon.

A Cynical "Jock."

Here the war diary records on 22nd August that "during the afternoon all officers and platoon sergeants met the commanding officer at the Y in Ypres." Thereby hangs a tale, but not, please to remember, of the 6th (Morayshire) Battalion Seaforth Highlanders. The unit in the story had trudged on and on, with the usual distances between companies, and were now on a track and apparently not on any road which was delineated on the map.

The C.O. whispered to the Adjutant, "Let them fall out!"

This done, he produced a map and, opening it, near a hedge behind which one miserable Jock was resting, he declared that the spot which they were now standing on was 200 yards north of the Y in Ypres, and indicated this point on the map. "With all due deference, sir," said the Adjutant (all Adjutants have to gargle with the language in this manner) "I think we are 100 yards west of the P in Ypres."

The tired soul on the other side of the hedge could not contain himself any longer. In an audible whisper to the Colonel's groom he summed up the situation. "Aye," he said, "We're just about the B of b—y well lost."

Dismal and Forbidding Country.

On the last Wednesday in August we set out for Poperinghe on foot, and thence by train to Reigersburg. For the afternoon and evening we lodged in a warren of dug-outs that had been burrowed in the far bank of the Ypres-Yser Canal, and before midnight we were on the more unpleasant side of the Steenbeek, some for the first time. Without the loss of a single life, the relief of the 8th Duke of Wellington's Regiment was accomplished in the front positions. We found a goodly advance of over a mile had been made since our last sojourn, so that after passing the old stronghold Mon du Rasta, the route lay across newly captured country.

O Company had been left back at Murat Camp, on the safer side of the canal, while B Company was in immediate support to A and D Companies, who garrisoned the front system. The countryside that revealed itself with the coming of day was as dismal and forbidding as ever, yet it did not surpass the area west of the Steenbeek. Up from that river the ground rose gradually, and the rise continued both on the right and on the left, while down the centre a depression marked the course of that ridiculous little river which boasted a depth of two feet and a breadth of six, and whose banks, where they existed, averaged five feet in height. On the map it was called the Lekker Boterboek. Needless to say, we did not so name it; it was re-christened without any apparent difficulty and by a very obvious corruption of the pronunciation.

The course of this burn bisected the Brigade front. On its right bank stood a sentry of the 6th Gordon Highlanders; on its left a 6th Seaforth did duty. Right opposite the middle of the front, you reached the highest ground near Pheasant Farm. This lay above and beyond this last-mentioned ruin, and in the enemy lines. From here, Poelcappelle and, in particular, the red steeple of the village church were plainly visible. From this point also might one see most easily the morass which now lay behind us and beyond the Steenbeek valley. The whole dread area was torn and broken with swamp and pond.

There is one exasperating feature in life in trenches. It is common knowledge that the other man's trenches—meaning those of the enemy—have always—no matter where they lie—a more habitable appearance than your own. Here it was no delusion. The ground rose gently up to and beyond the fair village of Poelcappelle, and there was reason to be envious.

The Enemy Dead.

The left of the front—you may remember the right was the left bank of the peculiarly named stream—lay opposite the concrete emplacement White House, and olfactory evidence was not wanting that the enemy garrison were in possession. No one disputed their right, for their sculls had quitted their bodies. Without intending to appear callous, one must admit that the most gratifying thing on the battlefield was the number of enemy dead, especially in Pheasant trench. We never had seen, and were never afterwards to see, such a dreadful accumulation of stricken humanity in so small an area. Few knew where the living enemy crouched, and to render the artillery fire more effectual and his own Battalion's positions in the posts more secure, our Colonel sent out batches of intelligence patrols. The difficulties of this work—not to mention the dangers and discomfort—were unspeakable. The scouts discovered, amongst many things, that the enemy trench was thinly held, that they had adopted our methods, and that their garrisons were in posts just as our were. They stalked—some of these stout fellows—quite a number of the isolated posts. One cannot at this far date conceive of the conditions under which they worked. To avoid being seen by the enemy when he fired his flares, the impulse was to drop to the ground, perhaps to be immersed in a deep water-filled shell-hole. Men were wet only once, and that was for the duration of the tour.

An Unlucky Shell.

The day was almost quiet, although the enemy from time to time pounded the Langemark road. Battalion Headquarters, too, was disturbed, and at six in the evening an unlucky shell fell in one of our advanced posts, killing

the whole garrison of six men. Shortly after this unfortunate incident, the enemy caught sight of one of our carrying parties bearing slowly up towards the front, and five of the men were wounded. Again, he sent a rain-storm of rifle grenades into our front positions, but no one was any the worse.

On the last day in August, the Companies changed over, and O Company, who had had a gruelling time in support, moved back to Murat, B Company coming forward.

A Heavy Bombardment.

Throughout the war the German suffered, most will admit, quite as much shelling (to say as much as one dares) as his enemies, and on the 1st day of September Pheasant Farm and the surrounding area in German hands was in no sense a desirable health resort. From breakfast-time until late in the afternoon every gun at our backs seemed to send its fell quota into this wretched neighbourhood. The very contours of the place changed, and, although it was dangerous to watch, one could see from the nature and colour of the debris thrown into the air the deadly effect of the fire. The enemy's artillery retaliated in comparatively feeble fashion on the support company and the Colonel's house, and continued petulant, well into that autumn evening. The Hun's wrath was not abated when he discovered, as he must have done sooner or later, that our right-hand posts had, during the turmoil, appeared mysteriously sixty yards closer. This was a clever little operation, and the support line was allowed to come on a matter of one hundred and fifty yards. Yards had begun to count in this swamp. Amongst the troops there had by this time been seven more casualties, three, alas! fatal. Then it was on the afternoon of our relief that an Albatross swooped down from the heavens and dropped a bomb in one of the advanced posts. As a result, two more comrades made the supreme sacrifice.

Truly a Relief.

The arrival of the sister Battalion, the Fifth Seaforth's, was truly a relief, and the last platoon of the Sixth were wending their weary way down the double duck-board track before midnight towards the comparative palaces in the canal bank.

Even amongst the surplus personnel left behind with our transport there had been casualties. A long-distance shell had come into the lines and caused the death of a sergeant and four men.

During the days and night that followed innumerable shells had their billets in the canal bank, and we received the unpleasant attention of many bombing aircraft. Yet our luck was, compared with neighbouring units, good, and although we lost one good fellow, only five were wounded.

The 4th Gordon Highlanders presently came to take up residence in the canal bank, and we moved back to A 30 Central. When the shelter of the huts had been reached, an almost unprecedented deluge of rain fell, and our sympathies were very much with those who were beyond the Steenbeek.

Air Notes of these Days.

It is not uninteresting to extract from the diary the air notes of these days with which we have been dealing, from which the remarks anent German activity have been excised:—

"On the 3rd September, 1917, there was much aerial activity, and one of our machines is reported as having brought down."

And again, "One of our aeroplanes was seen to dive to earth, having been winged supposedly by a shell from one of our own batteries. The occupants escaped with slight injuries."

And, "An aeroplane was observed falling in flames . . . it is surmised to be one of ours."

And all this was on one Brigade front and in weather which was anything but ideal for flying!

"Not this Brigade."

Then another quotation must be made from the diary, interesting in the light of later events.

To explain. Some one had given it out that the Army Commander (General Gough) was not enamoured of Scottish soldiers, preferring the product of his own nation. This was probably utter nonsense, but it makes what follows none the less interesting.

"In the afternoon," the diary reads, "the Commanding Officer summoned the officers of the Battalion present at the canal bank and imparted to them the Fifth Army Order issued by General Gough, referring to the lack of stamina of several Divisions in giving up ground, which, with a little more boldness in the face of the enemy counter-attack, might easily have been held. General Burn added his remarks at the foot of this order as follows:— 'The B.G.C. (Brigadier-General Commanding) well knows that none of these remarks applies to his Brigade.'"

Little did one then think that some day the Army Commander might run the risk of being reproved by his Chief. Nine months later, he might well have received a similar message with the word "Armies" substituted for "Divisions." The 51st Division had not so far yielded one yard of territory under compulsion from the enemy.

For barely a fortnight the Sixth remained in the corrugated huts at A 30 Central, and there were few idle moments. Gothas appeared regularly in the "wee sma' hours" and rendered the nights hideous. Fatigues were troublesome (they were by express order euphemistically called "working parties") and meant wearisome journeys up the line to bury

cables and mend roads. In addition, the construction round each hut of ugly but effective revetments against shelling and bombing went on under the personal supervision of Major Johnston.

A Strong German Attack.

Meantime, in the forefront of the battle, the 154th Infantry Brigade of the 51st Division were having a terribly strenuous time. Their battalions were the 4th Seaforths, the 4th Gordons, the 7th Argyll's, and the 9th Royal Scots. On a narrow frontage they had gained roughly another thousand yards in their bold advance towards Poelcapelle. This had enabled the artillery to take up their new positions in the Steenbeek valley and provided an advantageous jumping-off ground for future infantry operations, which, of course, included the storming of the village. This last objective and the danger of its attainment must have created much nervousness and uneasiness at German Headquarters, and in order to wrest these convenient assembly positions from the British, they launched [20th September, 1917] a counter-attack. The onus was laid upon the selected battalions to carry it through, and their whole force and strength were thrown against little more than a divisional front. The brunt of the onslaught, in the shape of seven out of the ten battalions, was directed against the Highland Division, and in particular the 154th Brigade. The German batteries were arranged in groups, and from their Houthulst, Poelcapelle, and Paschendaele groups they projected a terrific concentration of fire, chiefly on the high ground at Pheasant Farm and its neighbourhood on the British left, and also on the positions beyond the Lekkerboterbeek on the right. The very fury of it, perhaps put the 154th on their mettle, and in spite of dreadful casualties in the ranks of that gallant Brigade, there came an incessantly accurate rifle-fire from their line, and the enemy attack had failed miserably.

Our Artillery Arrangements.

Our artillery arrangements are interesting in this area and are peculiarly significant of modern warfare and the prodigious and oft-times useless (if not needless) expenditure of shells. New schemes had just been brought into play to meet the new conditions opposed to our advance, foremost amongst which were the ferro-concrete erections and the grey garrisons who lay here, there, and everywhere like holes in a pepper box. The artillery—amongst whom were our own Divisional artillery and some of our best friends—were organised into groups according to the calibre of their guns. The main creeping barrage came from the lighter guns, and was nearly always plainly visible to advancing infantry; the combing barrage combed the

communication-trenches beyond the main barrage; the neutralising barrage searched junctions in trenches and important assembly points, and issued to odd stragglers 6-inch and 60-pounder shells mainly; last of all, the standing barrage crushed the dug-outs and annihilated formed bodies of the enemy mustering for counter-attack. This last-mentioned barrage was supplied by all the heaviest of the guns, and performed the duties of a hoe, delving the enemy from their shelters in the rear, while the creeping barrage raked on and beyond them. It was dreadful work, and when one comes to put it in ink, this tremendous effort to exterminate our fellow-creatures has in it a repulsiveness that was much the reverse when the need was.

One German non-commissioned officer, as he was being herded to his cage, volunteered his opinion, perhaps to curry favour (for most of his grade were lying and treacherous), that it had been the most terrible bombardment in his unit's experience, and that his officers ran from it like as many sheep. Our cages held six of them on the night of the 20th and 235 of their men. For this action, twelve tanks had been allotted to the 51st Division. Only one of these—and that did right well—really came into action. The others foundered in the mud and immediately became the centres of danger zones, to which all gave a wide berth.

"Having the Gloom up."

After their arduous time, it was little of a surprise when the 152nd were ordered forward to toe the line and relieve their sister Brigade. We moved via the canal bank on the night of the 19th, and met on our way many of the freshly captured prisoners escorted by mounted policemen. In them we found a welcome indication how the battle had gone. If it took a lot to make one jubilant in such environment, the captures lessened somewhat the feeling of martyrdom (in the vernacular, 'the huff') that best overworked troops and to some degree made you the better soldier. You alone, one realised, were not fighting the war unaided. There were others who were doing equally well and might do better if you did not "fall cheerfully to" and cease being "fed up." And yet being "fed up" was better than having the "wind up," and both were infinitely preferable to having a "gloom up." All three were infectious and depressing, but none so acutely as the last; some men (one has heard) and some officers (one knows) were past masters in the art. Excellent fellows when the mood was off, but when grovelling in it (and enjoying it, mark you, in their own way, like an undertaker at his first funeral, which you were attending out of respect for the deceased) they set the pace towards miseries, real and imagined, and seriously impaired the efficiency of their neighbours.

Seaforths' Ticklish Task.

The Sixth stepped on with some anxiety towards Mon du Rasta, and here there were guides waiting to lead them to their positions in the line. The 7th Gordons and the Dandy Ninth had both to be relieved by the Seaforths, and the taking over was a ticklish task. Nobody knew where his neighbour was, and in few cases did the outgoing troops have any notion where, on the map, they themselves were. Such is the effect of hard battling over featureless country. The last of the troops relieved had not quitted the line by 5 o'clock on this autumn morning, and our Brigadier was not informed that we had taken over until half an hour later. The absolute chaos which existed throughout that night and many another in this sector, where the last thing one thought of was the enemy, cannot be depicted. One found the route by singular means—a particularly deep shell-hole, a trail of German dead and their attitudes, a derelict tumbrel, and always the German flares to put you all wrong. Many an officer and man lay shivering till the dawn might reveal some such familiar mark. Officers spent most of their time in an endeavour to find their bearings. Some men there were who never failed to retrace a route once traversed, lead though it might through a maze of exactly similar pools and holes: such men were invaluable.

On the day following the relief, our line was re-adjusted slightly and strengthened considerably. The bare road from St Julien skirted our left flank and led on to Poelcapelle, while down on the right, and about a thousand yards away to the south-east, that flank rested on the ridge. The Fifth Seaforths joined hands with us across the St Julien road, and both tried to avoid the highway like the plague. A London regiment guarded the extreme right. In front, flowed yet another and even smaller river, the tiny Stoombeek, deeply scoring the ground across the front; beyond again rose a slight ridge commanding the field for a muddy three hundred yards and more. Beyond that again lumped another crest. Pheasant Farm was still the dominating feature in the immediate area, and this was now happily in our hands.

The enemy infantry lay quiet with their dead; for our first day, despite heavy shelling, casualties only numbered three.

Massing Enemy Scattered.

In the early morning of the 23rd September there was a decided foreboding lull even in artillery fire. That soon revived, however, with redoubled vigour and intensity, aided by aerial co-operation. Continuing all day, it was suspected to be the prelude to an attempted sortie on the part of the enemy, and sure enough early in the evening a counter-attack threatened to develop. Formed bodies were reported to be collecting in the neighbourhood of Malta house, which was a "pill-box," a few hundred yards from the Battalion's left post. Captain Edwards, D.S.O., who was in command of A Company, immediately kindled the S.O.S. signal, and the artillery responded heartily in the required direction. Our men, too, poured a deadly fire from rifle and Lewis gun into the ranks of the massing enemy, who scattered, leaving many dead and wounded in the assembly positions. We lost in this minor operation nine men, four of whom were killed.

The 6th Yorks and Lincs. Regiment on the 26th of September took up the tale. In contrast to the preceding relief, this one was most successfully and expeditiously accomplished. Unfortunately there were casualties. One man was killed and twelve wounded, and three other men could not at the time be accounted for. They probably turned up later in camp or hospital.

Battalion's Return to Camp.

The Battalion hied them back, not quite in perfect order, to Siege Camp. We greeted gladly reinforcements. Lieut. Lyle Fraser rejoined, and 2nd Lieutenants A. Nicol and Nathaniel Cameron came to us from home.

So, on till nearly the end of September, 1917, we remained in this camp, bombed occasionally and at all hours, night and day, but suffering no loss in human life. Then came the indubitable heralds of a move—reams of congratulatory messages from Higher Commands and expressions of appreciation of work done.

With no regrets, except the lasting one of having left so many good and brave comrades dead ere their prime, we turned our backs on Ypres and the miseries of its cruel salient, and set our faces gladly and with perfect contentment towards the south and the Somme.

Cambrai—1917.

FIRST PHASE.

While London was being copiously bombed from the air, on the night of 29th September, 1917, Poperinghe, which was, as luck would have it, the station whence the Sixth Seaforths set out upon their next military excursion, was undergoing like torment, but with no evil consequences. On the contrary, the raid provoked some mirth in our ranks. Certain queerly assorted representatives of the Chinese Empire were struggling, silently and industriously, to improve the permanent way when the head of our column came into the station. Most of us knew that these were Gothas which were droning overhead, not so our Allies. The first bomb dropped a mile away, but its effect upon the working party was dynamic. One and all they were "off their mark" like professional runners at the pistol shot, scarcely waiting to "down tools." Now and again we saw them in their flight, in the light of an overhead lamp or the reflection from an engine fire, and heard them bleating as they ran into the darkness. Our troop train moved off two hours later, and the "gangsters" [non-commissioned officers in charge of Chinese labour troops] were still waiting for the return of their flock.

Bapaume—Ruthless Destruction.

We had been travelling rather fitfully for many hours ere the flare of battle and the "instantaneous sunsets" at the Ypres salient ceased to illumine our trucks and we finally disembarked at Bapaume. Before the war a town of some industrial importance and with an historical interest connected with the 1870 war, Bapaume, in the early morning light, presented a weird and dreadful appearance. Every building seemed to have been scythed to ground level, and so terribly complete had been its destruction that the shining lines of the railroad struck one as being an anachronism in such desolation. Its population had been a shade smaller than that of Forres. There was shelter for neither man nor beast down any of its well-paved streets.

Bearing eastwards and out of the town, we halted at Achiet-le-Petit. This diminutive village had shared the fate of Bapaume, as had every town and village in the wake of the retreating Huns in the spring of the year. Never had we seen such destruction so thoroughly and diabolically complete. Our pioneers and engineers had, however, been busy, and we found Bedford Camp waiting to be occupied. This was a camp part canvas and part huts, and the week spent there in shooting and drilling had its interest, but not by reason of these exercises. Each day, five men paraded for a day's leave in Amiens, that city of much beauty, where one could see well-

stocked shops, tram cars, and civilians who did not wear the tiresome khaki. With a "clean sheet," you had a sporting chance of making the trip and obtaining a holiday in town.

We were not left long in Achiet before trekking towards the north, through Arras and on to Bois-èux-au-Mont. The march was made in teeming rain, but we got to our new homes in "Durham" lines early in the afternoon and settled in fifty-six brand new huts, constructed specially for our reception.

THE Battalion diarist records here, "The following has been received from workers at Newmill, Elgin:—1400 cigarettes." Let us hope the workers at Newmill were told so and thanked.

There was apt to be at the front a "comforts" psychology which is, or has, its own explanation. All men were truly grateful to the home folk for what they were doing; the countless bales of good and useful things which came out and were distributed as they arrived meant a great deal more than (on leave, for example) we were given to admitting.

Impossible it was to tell each of us singly that here was a mincing-machine from the "Moray Comforts"; a pair of sandshoes from the "Egin Comforts"; a cigarette from the sisters at Fochabers V.A.D.; another from the Highland Society; and the rest a ration from an infallible Government. Life was too short. Each night's orders contained a recital of any gifts the day's post might have brought, and many an evening, before lights out, the Company Orderly Sergeant might have been heard repeating in dull monotone the outcome of the love and gratitude of our ain folk.

New Officers Arrive.

The month of October, 1917, saw some new officers join the Battalion. Amongst whom were 2nd Lieutenants F. T. Aitken and J. P. Notman; both had seen service in the ranks of the Sixth. Also, by some mischance, there came to us another Colonel, Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy, D.S.O., for what purpose or in what capacity no one has ever discovered. He just reported as he had been ordered to do. He came on our strength through, it was thought, the plaisanterie of some betabbed monarch. At General Headquarters such gentlemen were wont to deal with reinforcing officers as we have seen the Findhorn fisherwomen deal with the yawl's catch—with some concern that each "bing" should nearly balance, but with no regard whatever for the feelings of the aquatic vertebrates. Colonel Kennedy helped greatly in our training, and we were sorry when he left us, although he went to strengthen and

lead a battalion of his own regiment. It was good to have Major Willie Doig back in this month. He, Captains Mair and Fysh, and Lieutenant Ian Robertson were the last of those officers of the Battalion who had crossed the Channel in 1915 and were at this time on the strength.

From the miscellany of incidents that one gleans from diaries relating to this period, of the highest importance must be deemed our football victories. Each of our companies had beaten its opposite number in the Sixth Gordons, and D Company finally emerged winners of the Brigade competition.

American General's Inspection.

Our interest in America and the war was somewhat roused by a lecture delivered by Rev. Dr John Kelman on that nation, and on the heels of the reverend gentleman came a great American General, Major-General Ebenezer Edwards, who commanded the 26th American Army, to inspect the 152nd Brigade. One remembers the inspection very clearly for many and varied reasons—some for the disappointment they experienced at there being no demonstration of a certain unmentionable art, in the practice of which the elderly General was justly or unjustly reputed to be an able exponent. The bagpipes amused him, and the bearing of the men he admired, and our Transport won his heart completely. His remark on passing a sturdy pack-pony of the Fifth Seaforth's is classical. "Wha' a lil' block!" he was understood to say. Then his questions addressed to the men as to what their pay-balance was, how long their boots were good for the road, and so on, had surely the merit of originality. On the whole, the American Army was pronounced a possible show. They were to fire their first shot in anger in France—a week later.

One Black Day.

Following on a conference of commanding officers at Brigade Headquarters, we moved into trenches on the 16th of October, east of Héninel and south of the Arras-Cambrai road, where we relieved the 5th Gordon Highlanders. So deep and secure were the approaches which had been excavated in this sector, that this move was accomplished in the early afternoon. An unfortunate shell burst in one of the best of the communication trenches—Foster Avenue—just as a platoon was moving slowly up, and caused seven casualties. None of these was fatal. Our days and nights in this part of the front were abnormally quiet, and, but for one black day, the tour was not an unhappy one. Our front line was meagrely held by posts, and at each post there had been constructed protections of every kind. In some cases there were shell-proof and commodious dug-outs; in others, cramped and shallow shelters, which

were but death-traps in the event of a shell finding them. In one of the latter variety, called Dead End, lay a post of one of our companies with a garrison of seventeen men. In the afternoon of the 19th the enemy had not shown much inclination for vigorous offensive tactics, except that he had intermittently projected sling-bombs and some mirenwerfer shells. It must have been a minenwerfer, or something equally heavy, which found Dead End post. None of the garrison of seventeen escaped unhurt. The sentries on duty were buried, and Death took its cruel toll of ten.

The countryside was good to look upon, deeply scored though it was by trenches and trench systems. Down in the valley of the river Sensée nestled Haucourt, which had been the left wing of the British Army in the Le Cateau battle of 1914. The weather was pleasant, and in the sunshine the little villages, in German hands and well behind his lines (such places in German hands had always, by the way, a very alluring interest), showed nothing of ruin or destruction. These things were to come, and all too soon. It was a country little wooded and, gently undulating, with the British Army in strong commanding positions and occupying—and the chagrin of it all must have been ever present with our enemy—a goodly stretch of his famous Hindenburg line.

"Concentrated Hate."

Throughout each night patrols were "over the top," endeavouring to locate enemy posts and constantly visiting and examining his strong wire, while our wiring parties picketed innumerable coils of British barbed wire round, beyond, and between the posts. Such duties had their measure of danger and were fatiguing; yet they were wonderfully free from serious incident. Early in the mornings, between three and four, one got accustomed to a fifteen minutes of concentrated hate, in which every description of bomb, shell, and dart poured into our trenches. It was, nevertheless, a quiet sector. Many of the enemy shells contained gas, and one remembers the night (the diary has it on the 22nd October) when the wind, which had been favourable to the enemy, suddenly veered round and wafted back to his lines his own special issue of poisonous gas. His warning gongs and his bells broke into frenzied noise along his front. It was amusing, but one cannot indulge in very hearty laughter when hooded and gagged by a box-respirator.

The Battalion's sojourn in the Chérisy sector was a brief one of six days. For a further spell of six days we lived in reserve at Henin Camp, and then we were on the road for Boiry Becquerelle, to meet a convoy of motor buses. Our ride in these did not take us far afield. We slept that night in a very well known neighbourhood, and in the Y huts

near Etrun and Marceuil. There were once more rumours of big things at hand.

Tanks and Coming Events.

In the early days of November the only thing worthy of note was a lecture by Brigadier-General Pelham Burn to all officers of the 152nd Brigade, which was attended by many officers of the Tank Corps. The lecture was held at Dainville, and appropriately enough, on Guy Fawkes' Day in a Y.M.C.A. or Church Army hut. Great secrecy had to be preserved, and even the good man of the cloth in charge of the hut was led protesting from its precincts, while stout sentries were posted at each window when the General talked. We soon discovered why, in our training, the Colonel had developed a new passion for sending us in a stupid procession after empty half-limbers; they had represented tanks, and tanks were to figure largely in the scheme that was unfolded. Highland officers fraternised with officers of the Tank Corps as the plot was revealed. The men of the 51st Highland Division were once more "for it."

The daring and magnitude of the scheme set one hoping and praying for good weather. In the spring of the year the Army had won the doubtful reputation of attacking "every bonnie Monday," instance the battles of the 9th, 16th, and 23rd of April; and rumour had it that this had something to do with the choice of Monday, 20th November, for the launching of this new operation. Its object was to break the enemy's lines in unorthodox fashion, by a coup-de-main with the assistance of tanks, to push the entire Cavalry Corps through the gap thus made, and to seize Cambrai, Bourlon Wood, and the passages over the Sensée river, thereby cutting off the troops holding the German front between the village of Havrincourt and that river. Secrecy was of the first importance, and the methods adopted by the men amongst themselves, taking as they did the law into their own hands to enforce its strict observance, spoke worlds for their loyalty and enthusiasm for the raid.

The Scheme of Operation.

One must study the map to be able to follow the scheme of the operation and its general idea. Our Division was in the 4th Corps under Lieut.-General Woolcombe, whose intention it was to capture as rapidly as possible the heights of Bourlon and to push forward advance guards of all arms of the service for this purpose. It was to make all the difference should Bourlon Wood and village fall on the first day. Then the passages of the Canal du Nord from Sauchy-Cauchy to Sains-les-Marquion were to be taken and the Corps established on the line from Rumancourt to Inchy. Thus would the very gun positions in the

German salient be immediately threatened and their infantry isolated and cut off. The Flesquieres ridge and the ground north of it, with the hundreds of guns of all calibres that were known to have their emplacements there, Cantaing village, and forward to Fontaine-notre-Dame, all were to be captured and outposts pushed out to the north and west. The 51st Division was actually to close up on Cantaing and Fontaine. A Cavalry Division was thereupon to advance to turn Noyelles, Cantaing, and Fontaine, and a detachment of this Division purposed moving to Sailly and Tilloy. Cambrai would then be isolated, for this Division would have joined hands with the remainder of the Cavalry Corps, who were by this time to be east of that city. The main body of the premier Cavalry Division was upon this to capture Bourlon, and, after leaving sufficient troops to hold this eminence till the arrival of the Infantry, had its further objectives in the passages of the Canal du Nord between Sains-les-Marquion and Palleul. This, then, was the scheme, the general plan being to dispense with the usual artillery preparation and its consequent warning to the enemy, and to depend almost entirely upon tanks to smash through the enemy's wire, which was of the strongest and most formidable description all along his front.

The capture of Cambrai, Sir Douglas Haig wrote long afterwards, was subsidiary to the operation, the object of the advance towards that town being primarily to cover the flank and to puzzle the enemy regarding our intentions. But we dreamt of the citadel and the interesting possibilities of investing a town that had, prior to the war, a population of nearly thirty thousand.

Preparations went on apace, and day after day, on a full-sized course at Wailly, we trailed after hundreds of smoking tanks. Model courses in our camp had been constructed and we had lectures "ad nauseam." Yet no amount of practice attacks could interfere with our celebration of the 13th of November, 1916, as a general holiday on the anniversary of the glorious battle of Beaumont Hamel, where the Division was pleased to think it had first won its spurs.

Three days later and we were disembarking from a troop train at Bapaume, and the night of the 16th of November was spent in huts in the vicinity of the ruins of Rocquigny village. We lived like as many cabbages during the following day, and at night marched a few miles nearer the line to the ruins of Metz, where we found excellent accommodation in the cellars of that village. Again we were kept indoors and rested for the big things of the morrow.

The Assembly of the Tanks.

One has very vivid recollections of the assembly. The 36th Ulster Division, who were holding the line from which we were to

advance, had been raided by the Germans on the previous night, the 18th November, and had lost two or three men. There was a distinct likelihood that these fellows would unwittingly reveal the impending offensive to the enemy, who, we well knew, had diabolical means of wheedling information out of helpless prisoners. As a matter of fact, it was afterwards ascertained from prisoners taken that it was generally known in the ranks of the enemy that an indefinite "something" was coming off, but few, if any, had heard tanks suggested. This is a most remarkable fact. The tanks numbered hundreds, and the noise of one moving tank is very considerable. The flare of a "Verrey" light or the flash of a gun clearly showed against the sky-line the huge outline of the landships topped with their fascines. Further, and to add to the nervous strain, the road to Trescault from Metz had been recently metalled, and the constant tumult of carts and gunlimbers rattling over its surface predominated over all other noises and must have been audible to a reasonably watchful German sentry. The night was particularly dark, and a gentle southerly breeze wafted the potent fumes of petrol across to our enemies. Yet all along the front most weapons of warfare were silent, and it was fortunate that it was so.

The Advance Begun.

The whole Brigade was ready in position by six in the morning, and the thirty-six tanks allotted to the 152nd had already moved along their taped routes to the front trenches and were waiting for the signal to advance—with what anxiety and with what impatience may be readily imagined.

Promptly, at twenty minutes past six on the morning of 20th November, the barrage fire opened, with one light gun a fraction of a second ahead of the main volume of fire, and the area became alive like a disturbed ant-hill. The fleet of tanks was led in person by their Commander, who flew his admiral's flag at the peak of his tank. On the eve of the battle he had sent out to his officers the following message:—"England expects that every tank this day will do its damndest!" The leading tanks were soon across our front line, and in the gathering light were followed, at easy intervals, by the first waves of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders and the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in widely extended order. In turn, and a few minutes later, came the remaining platoons of the Battalions bound for the farther objectives.

Following the Tanks.

The expanse of territory about to be traversed showed itself to be devoid of swamp and bog, and of a very open nature, at any rate in the immediate foreground. Down the

Trescault spur, our starting place, the ground sloped to what was known as "the Grand Ravine," which lay a mile and more ahead, with its deep re-entrants on either flank marking roughly the boundaries of the Division. Up and beyond, the crown of the Flesquieres ridge frowned down upon the country back and fore, and over its crest nestled the pretty little village which gave the ridge its name. From here, if you could keep your eyes off the spires and turrets of Cambrai, away to the left your attention would be rivetted on the eminence of Bourlon. The dull mass of its wood rose abruptly to the view, in complete domination of every other feature in the landscape and creating, somehow, a presentiment of future trouble. Yet we had real pleasure in marching over dry, hard soil; the uniqueness and the audacity of this "awfully big adventure" intoxicated. We followed our tanks as the children of Hamelin had followed the Piper.

The Enemy Trenches Described.

The enemy trenches require a brief description. The nearest of his sentries stood in lightly-wired outpost lines, half-a-mile from our assembly positions. Down the grassy slope for something more than a kilometre, and the Hindenburg front line and its support trench appeared: they were defences of superb strength. Five broad belts of barbed wire, red with rust, guarded each; and so deep and broad were the trenches themselves, that several of our tanks ditched, even after they had successfully shed their fascines in trying to traverse them. (Fascines, it may be explained, are gigantic bundles of sticks, very much compressed and of great weight, carried on the top of the tanks. When the tanks were confronted with particularly wide and deep obstacles, the tank commander, by some mechanism, dropped the fascine in the hole and drove his tank over it.) Farther on, Mole trench was a poor construction, both narrow and shallow. Here and there in the system bulged small posts in isolation and puny subsidiary scrapes in the earth.

All France is scarred by sunken roads, and in this district they were an abomination. Yet the Grand Ravine—the cause of many unpleasant nightmares—proved a mere six-foot ditch, well revetted and duck-boarded. Continuing towards the railway, one more traversed trench might bar our way before we arrived at the support system in front of Flesquieres, on the far side of the crest of the ridge. For there lay Hindenburg support trench, backed by Flesquieres trench, three hundred yards in the rear. The village, the chateau, and its wooded and walled garden were all forbidding features, and the whole fortified system was impregnable without the aid of tanks.

A Plate of Porridge.

We could see little of the sister regiments and their progress in the first minutes of the battle; and the Sixth, who were to move alongside the Sixth Gordons to the far objectives, had to resign themselves to a long hour and more of waiting. It was "nervy" work; and the sky gave an aggravating promise of rain. While the air was filled with screaming shells and the patter of a thousand machine guns, and the smoke of the battle completely obliterated from our view the momentous happenings in front, each man of the Sixth set him down to enjoy a plate of hot porridge. The meal was finished in comfort: the enemy was flabbergasted by the immensity of the attack. He could not concentrate his fire, for the attack seemed to have no limits. His bullets flew wide and harmless, and the tide of troops and tanks flowed on.



CAPTAIN R. K. WELLWOOD, M.C.

C Company's Hard Task.

Every one was in high spirits, without being hysterical, as a move was made out of the trenches and we stood ready on the Charing Cross-Trescault road. C Company, led by the great-hearted Roy Wellwood, moved off on the right, with A Company on their left under the charge of Edwards. At 8.10 the start was made, and, passing through the

various lines of successful troops and along the narrow lanes, which had been cleared in the tiers of enemy wire by the tanks, A and C overtook the tanks just beyond the broad-gauge railway that ran into Ribécourt. Thousands of prisoners of all shapes and sizes were met on the way to the cages. All within earshot of the Sixth were greeted in characteristic fashion. One gallant of the Fifth Seaforths caused much amusement when he appeared mounted on a captured horse (heavy draught). The tanks glided along, bowing their way over the uneven ground, and the ardent waves of men followed over the dry dead grass. Oh, that it had remained as dry and as firm! Hindenburg support trench was the objective, and the guns were still pom-melling it, as the advance approached.

Heedless of this, His Majesty's landships sailed forward, but their numbers had been sadly depleted. Only seven were in action, and poor C Company had none to follow. These seven—Emperor II., Edinburgh, Endurance, Exquisite, Eurvalius, Egypt, and Eileen were the names—were soon astride the trench on the left Battalion front, and making short work of the garrison. The first strong line of A Company had little difficulty in entering. They lost but three men in the process.

It was otherwise with C Company. On their territory no tanks were present to lead the attack. The wire was untouched, and the snake in the trench not even scotched. The Germans fired straight and often. With the greatest daring, the officers and men pushed on, ultimately forcing their way through terrible wire and fire into the trench. Wellwood was wounded early in the battle, and he was a grave loss to his Company. There followed hard and bitter fighting, and although the Germans in large numbers succumbed, many good Seaforths went under: it was indeed a costly fight. Along to the right the enemy garrison were still holding on, and a keen endeavour was made to mop them up and to join hands with the Sixth Gordons. This was not to be accomplished, however. The fire from Flesquieres was too insistent and searching. A bombing block had to be, and was, established. In a corner of Flesquieres wood was discovered an artillery observation post, surmounting a dug-out. Our fellows soon cut the telephone wires, and, after some energetic persuasion, two German officers and eight signallers sulked out of the shelter.

Dreadful Tank Disaster.

The time was now after eleven, and the position that Seaforths and Gordons had each two companies in the Hindenburg support trench, and the two remaining companies of these battalions were now advancing to pass through and beyond them. B Company was ably led by James Munro, while C had the good fortune to be under the charge of Flett.

Then a dreadful disaster befell the tanks, and the troops witnessed a terrifying spectacle.

It is enough to record that, as each of our tanks reached the crest of the Fesquieres ridge, they were caught and totally destroyed by the devastating fire of a field gun fired at point-blank range and from but a stone-throw away over the ridge. In most cases the machines caught fire, and there were terrible scenes. Many of the crews escaped to take their revenge alongside the infantry. One inspiring incident will remain long in the memories of those who were there. A youthful officer (whose name we afterwards discovered was Bion), when his tank was rendered useless, dismounting one of the Lewis guns, gaily clambered on to the top of his tank, and fired drum after drum of bullets into the village. His very boldness was his preservation. He remained in this exposed position until his gun became too hot to fire. Then he descended and joined the Seaforths.

Gallant Officer and Faithful Orderly.

All hope of assistance from tanks was now removed; such of them as had not been put out of action by enemy contrivances were stranded here, there, and everywhere over the ground that had been captured, through, we afterwards learned, a shortage of petrol. Little wonder, then, that the two companies advancing to the assault of Flesquieres trench were assailed by a deadly and concentrated machine-gun fire from the houses in the stricken village and the terra cotta brick wall surrounding the castle grounds.

Many gallant onelaughts made little headway, and, except at one point, direct assault of the line was impossible. One officer and one man outstripped all others in the attempt. That officer was Lieutenant Donald Grant; the man's name is unknown to the writer. Bayoneting his way along a communication trench with a precision and determination that little could have withstood, Grant, closely followed by his faithful orderly, cleared all before them. Presently and in the continued din of fire, they were seen to leave the trench, pressing on. They went forward only a few yards when both fell almost simultaneously, fatally wounded. There was a great and inspiring attempt to reach the final objective. These efforts to pierce the German defence cost much, and that good soul—the hero of an army at Beaumont Hamel—Captain George Eric Edwards, D.S.O., fell, and such gallant officers as Lieutenants Aitken, Mann, Macleod, and Paterson. In two of the companies, one officer alone remained.

Determined Attacks.

It was characteristic of Colonel M'Donald that he should choose this critical moment to appear in the forefront of the strife. Im-

mediately on his arrival, he set himself to reorganise the broken remnants of companies, and time and again he personally led attacks against the village with a desperate valour that brought a measure of success. As each party left their position, a tremendous fusillade greeted them, and there were inevitable casualties. Yet the survivors breasted forward, and by a miracle of doggedness actually gained a precarious footing in the enemy trench. From their position there, further gallant and determined sallies were made towards the village, but the incessant fire from the high chateau wall and the buildings beat them back again and again. Rain fell in a steady drizzle. Early in the evening six tanks came up, but their effort was distinctly disappointing on this occasion. One small Seaforth section, who, in the trail of these tanks, managed to effect an entry to the village, were left in their exposed posts until ordered to withdraw. For some time they maintained their hold on the portion of the village wall, and in the darkness made a noble show of strength by unceasing fire from rifle and gun.

The Third Army had accomplished a great day's work. The success in certain quarters was bewildering, and, but for that stout brick wall of the Count of Flesquieres, the victory carillon which pealed so joyously in London and in Forres might have done so with good reason.

The civilian in uniform will never be able to grasp why Flesquieres stayed the whole advance, in view of the intelligence that, early in the afternoon, Premy Chapel and Graincourt were both in British occupation. This must have been—in point of fact, was—within the knowledge of higher command. The situation might be likened to the representation on the stage of a two-roomed scene. The audience are "in the know," for the walls that would otherwise block their view of the interiors of the two rooms have been removed. In vain the hero hammers on the locked door in the dividing wall. All he really has to do, although it would be unusual and spoil the show, is to go round: and the audience could have told him so.

If Cambrai had been fought in November, 1918, instead of November, 1917, the result would have been entirely different: and the Armistice would have been expedited. Some one had twiddled his thumbs, while the Germans, all but hopelessly thrashed, alike surprised and thankful, quietly withdrew during the night from the apex of the Flesquieres salient.

The whole strength of the 51st Division was now in the field. Throughout a miserably wet night they did what they could to prevent this escape, but at 6.45 on the succeeding morning, when the advance was recommenced, village and ridge were found to have been

vacated, and except for a few odd encounters, which meant prisoners and much valuable booty, the final objectives west of Cantaing (which have already been narrated) were attained.

Wonderful Scenes.

The sights which we witnessed as we lay in our new positions brought fresh hopes. There were enthralling scenes—the cavalry cantering into action in perfect formation (not, unhappily, to be maintained for long); the 4th Gordon Highlanders, with pipes and drums, marching as at a review in column of route; the sight of a real live battery galloping forward and coming into action at our ears; and the constant coveys of aeroplanes low-flying and intrepid. We were all out on the common task, and the sight of others in their might, enthusiasm, and strength had an inspiring effect upon our portion of the British Army.

And the 154th Brigade, under that very gallant Seaforth, General K. G. Buchanan, now took up the tale and went on with a will.

Cavalry's "Backward March."

The Brigade report for the Wednesday is an anti-climax and makes sad reading:—

"The following day was spent by the Brigade in re-organising the line and resting the men as much as circumstances permitted, but owing to the number of troops about and the lack of accommodation, together with the wet state of the ground, it was impossible for the men to get much sleep. Orders had been issued for the field cookers to be brought forward without delay, but their movement, together with that of the ration limbers of units and doubtless also of the waggons of ammunition for the guns, was much delayed through all available roads being closed for the BACKWARD MARCH OF THE CAVALRY."

Scores of riderless chargers galloped through the Brigade lines during the afternoon.

Up till the night of the 22nd November, 1917, the known casualties of the Sixth Seaforths were six officers and 20 men killed and two officers and 43 men wounded. Our prisoners exceeded 300, while the innumerable guns taken included two high velocity 5.9's.

Cambrai—Second Phase and Later.

To appreciate the situation on the morning of the 23rd of November, one must advance with the Gordons, the Royal Scots, the Argylls, and the Seaforths of the 154th Brigade. Their programme included the capture of Cantaing and Fontaine, and they fulfilled it: they took both villages, but not without hard, stubborn fighting, in which the tanks gave much useful help. In truth, Cantaing was stoutly and successfully defended by dour Germans until an odd tank, on a mission to Fontaine, called casually in passing at the village and cleared it of the enemy. The Gordons entered and had the unique and embarrassing experience of being hailed by civilians, French peasants who wept unaffectedly with joy and imperilled the modesty of the Gordons by falling on their knees before their deliverers. Unfortunately, darkness came on soon after the capture of Fontaine, and many Germans lurked in the cellars of the village throughout the night. It was totally impossible to hunt them out, and the Battalion of Seaforths who were then in the village had few men left and none for such an all-important task. There were no reinforcements available for anybody. Every one must stand on his own legs.

Germans Recapture Fontaine.

During the night our artillery moved forward, and the first message of the early

morning contained the pleasant news that the enemy were massing in Bourlon Wood, presumably for purposes of counter-attack. The perimeter of the village of Fontaine was between three and four thousand yards; the 4th Seaforths were reduced to two tired and sadly depleted companies: their position, it would have needed no tactician to discern, was impossible; they had but a short broken field of fire. Then again the enemy were still in their very midst. No one knew how many there were, or where they skulked. Here a bomb explosion, there a sniper's bullet, told that they were alive to their positions of advantage. From the first the result was inevitable. An artillery officer got a horse somewhere and galloped to the rear for assistance, but the attack started before he left, and the waves of enemy grey, steadily and regardless of losses, came surely on to within bombing distance of our front posts. By sheer weight of numbers they swarmed into the village and pushed their way through. Some stirring incidents mark this counter-attack, but these are the story of the 4th Seaforths. Fontaine was once more in the hands of Germany.

A joint attack was ordered for the next day. Fontaine was to be retaken by the 51st Division, and Bourlon Wood by the 40th Division.

Arriving at a Fateful Decision.

It cannot be said that there was enthusiasm; the operation proposed was hardly popular even, it is said, with Divisional or Brigade Commanders. Both the 152nd and 153rd Brigades were more or less played out: they had had their fill of fighting, and General Harper had a difficult question to settle when he came to determine which of these Brigades should be in the van of the attack. The decision was taken in a somewhat novel way. General Harper had been discussing the situation along with three of his Brigadiers—Buchanan, Pelham Burn, and (I think) Beckwith, in the dining-room of the castle of Flesquières. He rose suddenly from his seat and left the room, which was filled with many officers at work, and made for the entrance doorway, followed by Generals Pelham Burn and Beckwith. Standing at the door of the main entrance to the chateau, General Harper produced a coin and with a "heads" 152, "tails" 153, sealed the fate of the former, and incidentally that of our Battalion. It was an historic incident.

The reasons governing the decision of General Headquarters to press on farther are revealed by Sir Douglas Haig, who wrote—"An additional and very important argument in favour of proceeding with my attack was supplied by the situation in Italy." This argument would have been lost on the troops, who formed up for the third time in four most strenuous days to oust the enemy from Fontaine and Bourlon. The 6th Seaforths and the 6th Gordons were to bear the brunt of their Divisional attack, and the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were to advance to form a defensive flank on the east and south-east sides of the village of Fontaine.

General Pelham Burn.

The advance was first timed to begin at 6 a.m. or thereabouts, but, as all arrangements could not possibly be made before that hour, the time was changed to 10.30 a.m. Twenty minutes before zero hour, a dozen tanks were to move out of a sunken road and forward towards Fontaine. One may gather something of the condition of the men, when told that General Pelham Burn moved along the assembly positions amongst them with the glad tidings that, come what might, they would be relieved that night. The presence of the General—he was a handsome fellow, who looked the "complete soldier" even in a tin hat—encouraged all ranks, and no matter how very severe had been the strain which had already been imposed upon them, they determined to get on with the business and to give each man of his best. Efficiency as a fighting unit was the General's first consideration, but we imagined that the chief factor in bringing this about was studiously and assiduously to tend and cater for our

physical comfort and (and this was important) to see that his staff and all inferior officers did likewise. The Sixth Seaforths thought he was all right: they had higher praise for no officer.

The Haughty Tank.

Owing to the open nature of the country in this region, great difficulty had been experienced in determining upon a line for the assembly, and the storming troops had to take up their position behind Brigade Headquarters before daylight. As was usual, a fierce artillery barrage was to precede the advance. Before the battle—perhaps an hour before—it was discovered that there was no responsible senior officer with the Tank Contingent (who were also ready for the fray) with whom the details of the attack might be discussed by the Brigadier, except one rather haughty Battalion Tank Commander, who was averse to taking orders from mere infantry. One chuckles over such happenings nowadays, but they were troublesome enough and serious enough at the time, and, be assured, our Tank friend suffered; General Burn was famed far and near for his glibness, and his reputation was well-founded. The tanks were miserably organized, or rather they were miserable by their want of organization. Throughout the day on the 23rd November they came into action in futile dribbles. On no less than three separate occasions three different sections, each comprising eleven of the monsters, with no knowledge of the situation, and with no orders except to get on with the war, appeared outside our Brigade Headquarters. Their commanders neither knew to which Brigade they were to attach themselves, nor had they any pre-arranged plan whereby they might achieve their noble purpose.

Description of a Great Attack.

In good time, however, all things for the early morning attack were amicably arranged and staged, and promptly at 10.30 a.m. the Sixth Seaforths and Sixth Gordons moved off. The morning was fair and bright, and the ground had absorbed most of the rain and was in good condition. The perfect order in which the men, who, by all the ordinary rules and regulations of war, ought to have been a spent force, marched forth, won for the Brigade considerable renown, and their feat of undaunted courage and energy on that morning stands out clearly and distinctly amongst the many glorious achievements of the Cambrai offensive. Soon the "crump, crump," of the German shells of all sizes burst to their front, and some casualties were suffered. On the waves moved in excellent style. All morning Bourlon had been visible. Now Fontaine came into view for the first time—a long straggling village of one street. The line of the advance was clearly defined by numerous prominent landmarks. A and

O Companies, widely extended, led the Battalion and made good progress. On the right they kept for a time in close touch with the Gordons, until that Battalion was struck to a halt by countless machine guns firing from their right in La Folie Wood. This wood lies to the south-east of Fontaine, and is on a ridge overlooking and entirely commanding the village. No attempt had been made to attack, and no great effort to bring an adequate artillery fire to bear on it. The result was that the Gordons were forced to cover nearly half a mile from the south-eastern outskirts of the village; the 8th Argylls were brought to a standstill on, and ultimately consolidated, a line some distance behind. The right flank of the Seaforths was therefore in the air.

Maintaining a Precarious Hold.

In spite of all this, the Sixth pushed on, and were harassed by an enfilading fire which poured out of the buildings abutting on the street of the village and in its environs. Joining hands with a battalion of the Welsh Fusiliers of the 40th Division (who fought right gallantly), our leading waves reached the north-eastern corner of Bourlon Wood. Here they commenced to dig for dear life, and faced the enemy from the high ground. The fire was now too intense for any further movement, and, although the tanks did their utmost and met with slight successes, nothing would silence the interminable chatter of the machine guns. It would require no careful study of the map to perceive the extreme danger of these positions. The Company responsible for clearing the aristocratic end of Fontaine played an expensive game of hide-and-seek with an unscrupulous enemy. Tanks paraded the village street and fired into the semi-devastated buildings; no enemy was in view, and the tanks pressed on. Yet any attempt to enter the village brought dozens of enemy rifles and guns to cellars, windows, attic, and skylight. With a tank at his door, the Hun lay very quiet in the depths of the cellar (without which no French house is complete), and the village would have been easy prey had there been sufficient tanks, but, as has been already said, these came and went in penny numbers.

For a long time the Sixth maintained their precarious hold upon the ground even across the Bapaume-Cambrai road. They remained there, in fact, until the early afternoon, when the enemy were reported (it was said, but by whom is not known) to have driven the Welshmen back through the wood. This report was entirely unfounded, but on the strength of it, Captain Hudson's Company retired for some little distance, and from this time onwards few knew, until darkness fell, what the situation of our line really was, or if we had one for that matter.

Prior to this, the 5th Seaforths, who were in reserve, again came into action in order (one was inclined to think) to give one of the stray lots of tanks some troops to precede and to lead. Fortunately this attack did not materialize, as the particular tanks entirely lost direction (it was difficult to have any sense of it in a tank) and sailed aimlessly into the blue.

THE fighting on 23rd November was a failure, as you will readily understand, and had promised to be so before the operation was undertaken. The causes were manifold: the chief of them was the want of organization of the Tank Corps. One section or battalion commander carried a sporting gun, and most people who saw him thought it typical of the whole Corps. They were splendid fellows—officers and men—and the 152nd Infantry Brigade will yield to no one in their admiration for the Tank crews. They suffered severely; they helped every wave and every company, and they won the praise of the Sixth Seaforths by their splendid spirit alone. The work of the officers who did the outside repairs to a broken-down machine under fire was worthy of the highest traditions of the Army.

The Meagre Artillery.

Then a further cause was lack of support from the gunners. Artillery had been most meagre, because the guns had not had sufficient time to take up forward positions from which they could render effective aid. Had there been a sufficient artillery barrage, which would have meant that the right flank and La Folie Wood were masked by smoke, the results of a hard day's fighting would almost certainly have been different.

More losses had to be again registered. The ranks had suffered to the extent of 124, and 31 of that number lay dead or were unaccounted for. Two more officers were wounded. The toll was all out of proportion to the result.

Some more machine guns were placed amongst our captures, and prisoners to the number of over 100 went back to the cages under Sixth Seaforth escorts.

The night was wonderfully quiet, and in accordance with the General's promise the Brigade was relieved by the Guards, and staggered back to Flesquieres some time before dawn. A thoughtful Quartermaster had a hot meal ready for each tired man.

Back to the Rear Area.

The Brigade was on the move again early on the following day in a happy trek back to the rear area. Rumours were abroad of a rest, and most men thought it was long overdue. Through Ribecourt the Sixth trudged to Ytres station. The distance was paltry on such an errand, and nobody cared much where he went or was taken, as long as he was quit

for a time of the more gruesome horrors of war. Early on the Sunday their lazy train pulled into Aveluy, and men's spirits rose at the thought of the proximity of old Bouzincourt, which was the home of so many kindly French people who had taken the Sixth Seaforths to their hearts in the latter half of 1915. And yet how very few were now left who had known these happier days when the war was merely a not unpleasant experience, when the German was as rare as the brontosaurus, and when one's chief daily excitement lay in diverting a not unwilling commanding officer and staff from the unscavenged portion of your trench, which was (you assured them) receiving enemy attention!

Our destination was short of Bouzincourt by an hour's walk, and Colonel M'Donald wrung his hands over yet another deserted camp. "Bruce" huts had seen better days. To put it mildly, they were airy, were by no means clean, and duck-walks were about to disappear in the grass. The Colonel soon had the Battalion effecting improvements everywhere, and days had not passed before Companies were again hard at work checking deficiencies and reorganizing for the battle that might come again on the morrow.

Some Strange Rumours.

The Sixth had even got the length of falling in as a battalion on the beat of the drum, and were once again rid of the beastly imminent feeling of battling when the new call came. It was in the afternoon of the 30th November, 1917.

The General had just approved of their work on parade and had left to return to his chateau, when the orders came to "move at once," and to entrain at Albert. One rumour that was prevalent had, it is thought, originated with the shoeing smith, who had not been out on parade, and therefore was an authority: it was to the effect that Haig had been captured in his pyjamas. Apropos of this, it came out afterwards that a corps commander (General De Lisle) just managed to get away in a state of undress.

There was some excitement, and wild imaginings filled each truck as the train jolted along to Bapaume. The march to Barastre round midnight dulled the interest somewhat, and all were agreeably surprised to settle down in the huts and tents of L camp there.

The first day of December came, and no orders — nothing but ridiculous box-respirator drills, and the usual compilation of reams of fruitless indents. Sunday saw us on the march, and before noon we were billeted in huts near the ruined village of Frémicourt up north, on the main Bapaume-Cambrai road. In the morning Colonel M'Donald went forward to reconnoitre the line, and the men stayed at home to rub their feet with whale oil.

Fierce German Attack: Heroic Defence.

Meantime, there had been great doings in the vicinity of the Division's former triumphs and considerably to the south. The Germans had made a great bid to cut the British salient at its base, and had met with a bewildering success in certain directions until the Guards came into action and delivered their splendid attack. Isolated bodies of all branches of the service did wonderful work. The 29th Division had maintained their line intact; there were others—certain English county battalions—who had unfortunately been caught napping.

The Germans captured thousands of prisoners and many complete batteries. In the northern part of the salient they had chosen to launch their main attack. Five principal attacks were lodged in this region, and as many as eleven consecutive waves of German infantry had advanced to the assault. The defence of certain London Territorials was magnificent, and the behaviour of one company of Royal Fusiliers, and of one platoon of that company in particular, was beyond all praise. They were in course of being withdrawn from an advanced position when

"the German attack burst upon them. The officer in command sent three of his platoons back, and with a rearguard composed of the remainder of his company held off the enemy's infantry until the main positions had been organized. Having tactfully accomplished their task, this rearguard died fighting to the end with their faces to the enemy."

Essex Regiment's Historical Fight.

Then again (for such achievements had a big effect on the moral of the Sixth) must be quoted the record of the historical fight of that company of the Essex Regiment:

"After maintaining a splendid and successful resistance throughout the day, at 4 p.m. this company held a council of war, at which the two remaining company officers, the company sergeant-major, and the platoon sergeants were present, and unanimously determined to fight to the last and have 'no surrender.' Two runners who were sent to notify this decision to Battalion Headquarters succeeded in getting through to our lines and delivered their message. During the remainder of the afternoon and far into the following night this gallant Essex company were heard fighting, and there is little room for doubt that they carried out to a man their heroic resolution."

Enormous Enemy Losses.

Great execution had been done in the ranks of the enemy: their infantry were mown down in line by enfilade fire. Their losses were

enormous, but the position of our troops in the ridge north of Flesquières was now one of great danger. For this reason, it was resolved that a withdrawal should commence forthwith to a more secure position. This difficult operation started after dark on the 4th of December. It was attended with wonderful success, and was duly completed by the 7th December, without any serious hindrance on the part of the Germans.

At 10 p.m. on the 4th of December, 1917, the Sixth Seaforth's moved off, to take part in the withdrawal, along the main road to Cambrai. One could scarcely credit that this was approximately the new settled trend of the line; we went into reserve in the neighbourhood of Doignies; this village is five miles due west of Flesquières.

On realising the actual situation, most men had a distinct feeling of depression, and surely there was some excuse for it. Flesquières had come to mean more than a desert waste: all the striving and misery and the sacrifice of these four November days had been squandered for less than nothing. We were now evacuating the ridge; a steady, silent crowd was pouring back along the roads; and in their wake followed endless convoys of horse-drawn and motor transport.



MAJOR C. E. JOHNSTON, D.S.O.

We remained amongst these scenes and in the neighbourhood of Doignies (known, of course as "Dog's Knees") for fully a week.

From time to time there were changes in the billets of companies; and, although there was some shelling and air-bombing in the neighbourhood, we had no casualties. A Gordon Battalion replaced us on the 10th of December, and we marched back to tents at Bancourt camp, quite near Bapaume. From here our Colonel went to command the Brigade in the temporary absence of the Brigadier, and Major Johnston took over.

Throughout these pages little mention has been made of Major Johnston, who was our second in command, and who afterwards fell in action. He was always available, ready and willing, doing things and getting them done. His labour was unending, and all with one object in view—the comfort of the men; the private soldier to him was the first consideration in the field. Singularly cool under fire, he inspired confidence. He was a big man in all respects, rich in chivalry and honour. We remember him coming up the line before dawn on a wet miserable winter morning. He was accompanied by young Edward Dow (who was also afterwards killed), and they came down a deep dug-out with a steep narrow stairway into B Company headquarters. Things were quiet outside while various matters were discussed, but, as the Major reached the top step of the stairway, a local bombardment of our trenches commenced. It would not occur to him to wait until the danger passed. "On with the dance, let joy be unconfined," was his remark, and forthwith he stepped into a foot of mud, followed by Dow.

During our fortnight in Bancourt the weather was wretched, and such days as were not wet were intensely cold. Depressing weather did not interfere with the usual training, parades, digging "fatigues," and the collection of everything salvable in the neighbourhood of the camp.

A Good Omen.

Colonel M'Donald rejoined in time to lead the Battalion into the line three days before Christmas in relief of the "Dandy Ninth." One poor fellow of C Company was seriously wounded as we were leaving Bancourt camp by a fragment of an anti-aircraft shell. Otherwise the relief was completed without serious incident. We were barely settled in our posts when we were treated to the sight of a Hun plane being brought to earth by one of our Sopwith aeroplanes; this was cheering and a good omen.

The trenches which we now occupied ran right through the village of Boursies (where the well was), down past Hermies, and up west of Pronville. You will find a masterly description of the locality probably hidden (Oh the pity of it!) in the Records Office of the Regiment. It began—if you care to look for it—with the concise sentence, "There is

a well in Boursies," and contains an elegance and terseness of diction which would be surprising in any one but the gallant Colonel.

Some One had Blundered.

The lack of trenches was the feature of this sector. A dug-out was a rarity and a continuous line of trench, support or reserve, did not exist. Such a state of affairs, almost incredible and undoubtedly criminal, was nevertheless quite general up and down the line; and nothing whatever had been done to remedy it.

One can hardly write, even at this late date, without some show of the intense bitterness of thought which held sway amongst the Sixth—a feeling that was justified by later experiences. Even our War Diary gives an indication of it—"Very strenuous work has been done to remedy the reprehensible state of matters." This in Major Johnston's handwriting. Fortunately the enemy were quiet, and the Division, by magnificent efforts, turned the territory for which they were responsible into a strongly fortified position. It was the work of months, which continued right on until the first German offensive in the following year. All ranks were happy and thrived on the hard work, and it was interesting (if odious) to compare their mien with that of their neighbours, who stood shivering in shallow ditches—very pictures of misery in these wintry days.

Christmas Presents for Everybody.

On Christmas Day there were presents for everybody—a packet of biscuits, cigarettes, cocoa, and candles! The usual Christmas dinner was postponed until New Year's Day, which we were due to spend out of the line. The weather became "Christmassy"; we had the real feeling, for snow fell in the evening. The patrolling of No Man's Land had to be continued at night. One blessing of the season was that there were no casualties. The whole tour was a particularly lucky one

in this regard. We continued to receive reinforcements, and were always seeing old friends amongst them.

On the penultimate day of 1917 we gladly changed over with the 4th Gordons, and moved back to huts in Flémicourt.

Honours and Awards.

The news of honours and awards to the Battalion for the Cambrai offensive caused some celebrations. Our Colonel was awarded a bar to his Distinguished Service Order. Second Lieut. J. P. Notman received that order, while Captains Flett and Wellwood and Lieutenants A. A. Gunn, J. H. Munro, and H. V. Gould were each awarded the Military Cross. A bar to his Distinguished Conduct Medal was given to that gallant N.C.O., Sergeant W. C. Grant; and such other excellent non-commissioned officers as Sergeant Riach, Corporal Laurence, and Corporal Surtees had won the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and Sergeant John Mackenzie a bar to his Military Medal. No fewer than 18 non-commissioned officers and men had earned and were awarded the Military Medal. The Army Commander sent to the Sixth a message of congratulation.

Results of Cambrai Battle.

One may summarize the results of the long-drawn-out battle of Cambrai, that had opened so brilliantly, very shortly. The Germans had captured a portion of our original front line or system between Vendhuile and Gonnelieu and perhaps 5000 prisoners and a number of guns. In our possession were left 12,000 yards of what was formerly German frontage, together with over 10,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line and the reserve line of that name, a village or two, nearly 150 guns of all calibres, and 11,000 prisoners.

And perhaps the lame dog on the Piave had been helped—at any rate half-over his stile.

A. H. MACDONALD.

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